

**LIVING OUT
GOD'S TRUTH**

A 6-WEEK CONVERSATION BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF REV. DR. GARY MASON



Participant Guide

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Welcome

Welcome to **Living Out God's Truth**, a 6-week conversation based on the teachings of The Rev. Dr. Gary Mason that were offered at the 2019 North Georgia Annual Conference Gathering of the United Methodist Church.

A Methodist pastor, Mason has spent decades living out the truth of the Gospel in his home country of Ireland, including the violent conflicts of the late 20th century, known as The Troubles. His experience guiding individuals and communities to find healing and reconciliation following violent division now informs his teaching and coaching in communities across the globe. Through the lens of scripture and Wesleyan theology, he invites and challenges Christians to seek a faith of authentic, embodied, and communal truth. The goal of which is beloved community.

In one of his presentations during the 2019 North Georgia Annual Conference, Mason asked whether we as followers of Christ are becoming more like Jesus or conversely trying to make Jesus more like ourselves. Mason continued by stating that rather than squeezing and shaping the Gospel to fit our American culture and politics, we should be allowing the Gospel to shape us as we discover the truth about ourselves.

After these statements, Mason argued that the *“cross ought to be raised again at the center of the marketplace.”* This claim is in line with our Wesleyan foundation that is rooted in grace and social holiness. Yet, many of us have compartmentalized the practice of our faith as separate and apart from our everyday comings and goings. Thus, the faithful religious practices that were once at the center of everyday life seem to have been relegated to the inside of the church walls and used solely on Sunday morning for sharing among “friends.”

Today, however, our nation is in need of connection to grace and a social holiness—love for one another—because we are extremely divided. We, as followers of Jesus, should be providing a different way of being that is a witness to that which we all need: unity and an agape love for all. Our actions should be the witness in the center of the marketplace. But, doing so is no cheap matter, as Mason would say. Allowing our faith to intersect our Monday through Saturday life requires more authenticity and a belief in something bigger and better than what we currently see when we look around.

Allowing ourselves to live out our faith requires hope, courage, and commitment to the realness of Christ. Living a truth that goes against cultural norms will require us to examine ourselves, reconcile our differences, restore relationships with one another, and recommit to living out our social covenant together.

It is our hope that this six-session conversation will help you extend your practice of faith to all aspects of your life so that the Gospel may be known by others as authentic and hope-filled truth. These weekly discussion topics and exercises are intended to challenge you to dig deeper both personally and collectively about what it means to be a Christian today.

Ultimately, we pray for your transformation: personally, communally, and broadly in the marketplace.

The best way for us to begin is by allowing ourselves to be honest even though it may be uncomfortable.

I am an African American female from the South. I am an Ordained Elder in The United Methodist Church. I have achieved a higher level of education and now live out my calling to make disciples and transform the world, beginning with the university community and students under my charge. I draw on many different facets of my life and experience to inform who I am and how I view the world. Just as this is true for me, it is also true for each of us, which means we all view life through a unique lens.

Because of our varied perspectives, it is important that we are honest both with ourselves and also with one another. In our differences, we have much to teach each other. Our differences, however, should not supersede those things that we have in common—our commitment as Christians to love and respect one another. This is beloved community: the ability to see one another's differences and appreciate that our authentic diversity makes us all better.

—Rev. Dr. Tonya Lawrence-Miles

Solitary religion is not to be found there. "Holy Solitaries" is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than Holy Adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love, is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.

John Wesley

Session 1: Introduction to Series

Goal	To introduce everyone to this 6-week experience and to set expectations for this time together
This Session	<p>Your facilitator will begin with an introduction of the 6-Week Series. If you haven't already, read over the Welcome Letter from Rev. Dr. Lawrence-Miles and read Rev. Dr. Mason's bio. Familiarize yourself with your participant material. Our goals are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Authentic sharing2. Honest dialogue3. Stretched perspective4. Gaining an understanding (and even glimpse of) Beloved Community. <p>To meet these goals, each participant is expected to attend all session, engage fellow participants with respect, hold confidence with what is shared, and share as openly as you are comfortable.</p> <p>Further, you'll be offered the opportunity to complete readings and activities between sessions to maximize your experience and contribution to the conversation. Thank you for investing yourself.</p> <p>To break the ice, the facilitator will ask each participant to share his/her name, and respond to the following question: What are you hoping to gain by participating in this 6-week experience?</p>
Scripture	Read Romans 12. As it is being read, underline a word or phrase that best captures your hopes for this experience.
Prayer	Consider volunteering to pray using Romans 12 as intercession.
Video	Watch the "Being One with Each Other" video with Rev. Dr. Gary Mason
Reflection	Take a moment of silent reflection. Write down 2 or 3 moments in the video that left the biggest impression on you.
Discussion	<p>How did the content of the video relate to the Romans 12 passage?</p> <p>Now, consider the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In what ways have you experienced authenticity in the church?• What is your understanding of personal holiness?• What is your understanding of social holiness?• How do you define Beloved Community?

Response Work together to set expectations for the 6-session time together. Write them down on one large sheet of paper so that all may see and agree to group expectations for this experience.

For Next Week Complete the “Sacrificial Living” assessment and read “The Almost Christian” before next session.

Prayer In closing, pray the “All Together” prayer aloud and in unison.

Questions for Additional Conversation:

- In the video, Gary Mason stated that younger generations are seeking a religious experience that is both authentic and one that lives out its truth. Do you believe that your congregation offers the type of ministry that younger generations are seeking? If yes, provide examples of this authentic and truthful ministry. If not, what may be preventing this type of ministry from happening?
- In Romans 12, we are instructed not to conform to this world but to renew our minds so that we might know God’s will. In what ways have you conformed to the world around you?
- Can you provide examples of ways that you renew your mind? How often does your renewal happen?
- How does one discern God’s will?
- What does it mean to be a living sacrifice?
- How does one know what is pleasing to God? Does pleasing God matter to you?
- What challenged you today? How will you resolve it?

The great question of all, then still remains: Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart? Are you happy in God? Is God in your heart, 'that he who loveth God love his brother [sister] also? Do you love every man [woman], even your enemies, even the enemies of God as your own soul?

John Wesley

Session 2: Reconsidering Our Theology

Goal	To consider how our personal theology has contributed to our environment and identify beliefs that need to be reshaped.
Scripture	Read 1 Corinthians 13. Underline any word or phrase that jumps out at you.
Prayer	Consider volunteering to lead the group in prayer using 1 Corinthians 13 for intercession.
This Session	Share something you found revealing in the Sacrificial Living Survey. Watch the “Being One with Each Other” Session 2 video and reflect.
Discussion	Consider the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Theology means “beliefs about God.” How are you living out your theology as an individual? How is your congregation living out its beliefs about God?• What do your congregation’s behaviors and practices communicate to others (implicitly and explicitly) about your beliefs of God? Church? Worship?• Today, 9 out of 10 Americans are willing to go along with a theology of contempt in order to remain within the circle of power. In what ways do you either encourage or discourage this behavior?• In your opinion, what is the difference between an “Almost Christian” and an “Altogether Christian?” How do we move from one to the other?• Gary Mason stated that “religion is like fire. It warms but it can also burn.” As Methodists, how are we currently using our flame? Give examples.• In 1 Corinthians 13:1, Paul explains that action without love is nothing more than noise or an empty gesture. How does this concept relate to your understanding of the “Almost” and “Altogether” and your personal actions?• What do we do (past and present) in the name of God (knowingly and unknowingly) that is harmful to others?• If love never fails, then why does hate exist?
For Next Week	Read Wesley’s “Circumcision of the Heart” sermon and complete the “Through Their Eyes” activity.
Prayer	Finally, pray the “All Together” prayer aloud and in unison.

The circumcision of heart of a true Christian follower is one of acceptance with God. It is not either an outward circumcision or baptism ...but is a right state of the soul--a mind and spirit renewed after the image of him that created it. It is a truth that can only be spiritually discerned. The circumcision of the heart, the seal of thy calling, is foolish to the world.

John Wesley

Session 3: Repenting for Our Harmful Actions

Goal	To reflect upon that which we have done in the name of God that may have been hurtful to others and to repent for those things.
Scripture	Read Luke 6:27-49.
Prayer	Consider volunteering to lead the group in prayer using Luke 6:27-49 for intercession.
This Session	Share something that you found revealing in the “Through Their Eyes” exercise.
Reflection	Reflecting on the “Through Their Eyes” exercise, consider the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why might the differences in perspectives exist?• How might such difference be hurtful?• How might such difference be harmful to one’s growth in faith?• In what ways did we contribute to these harmful actions either by omission or commission?• For what do we need to ask forgiveness?
For Next Week	Complete the “Baptismal Covenant” activity prior to the next session.
Prayer	Finally, pray the “All Together” prayer aloud and in unison.
Questions for Additional Conversation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If we believe God is in control, why do we struggle with conforming to God’s will?• Often we acknowledge those with whom we have direct connections and overlook those with whom we are not connected. As Christians called to transform the world, how can we become more aware of those with whom we are not directly connected?• In what ways can we take a more active role in dismantling injustice in our community?• What challenged you today? How will you resolve it?

We are not sufficient of ourselves to help ourselves; that without the Spirit of God we can do nothing but add sin to sin. It is he alone who worketh in us by his almighty power, either to will or do that which is good. It is impossible for us to think a good thought without the supernatural assistance of his Spirit as to create ourselves, or to renew our whole souls in righteous and true holiness.

John Wesley

Session 4: Reconciling Our Will to God's Will

Goal	To reconcile our actions and our free will with God's will for our lives.
Scripture	Read Philippians 4. Underline a word or phrase that jumps out at you.
Prayer	Consider volunteering to pray using Philippians 4 as intercession.
This Session	<p>What has God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, revealed to you over the course of the week?</p> <p>Share what resonated with you in the "Baptismal Covenant Exercise." What does it mean to "surround" someone? Does this happen in our congregation?</p>
Discussion	<p>Discuss Paul's environment and condition and what this reveals about the "peace that surpasses all understanding."</p> <p>Consider the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why is it so hard for us to have hard conversation?• How do we disagree without disengaging?• How might knowing someone else's story change our experience worshiping God next to them?• What prevents us from knowing one another?• How do you describe a "politics of hope?" What would that look like in your church? Our community?• At our best, how are Methodists uniquely equipped to model beloved community to a divided society?• What does peace look and feel like to you?• What does peace require of us?
Prayer	Finally, pray the "All Together" prayer aloud and in unison.

Questions for Additional Conversation

- What challenged you today?
- How will you resolve it?

Almost Christians are Christian on the outside, and do nothing which the Gospel forbids. Almost Christians follow commandments, help faithfully, and acknowledge the importance of God. Altogether Christians have a heart purified by faith, love God and neighbor and work by this love.

John Wesley

Session 5: Recommitting to Living Out Our Faith

Goal	To recommit to living out our faith in all aspects of our life authentically.
Scripture	Read 1 Galatians 6. Underline any word or phrase that jumps out.
Prayer	Consider volunteering to pray using 1 Galatians 6 for intercession.
Video	Watch the “One With Each Other” Session 5 video from Gary Mason.
Discussion	<p>Discuss the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What views have changed for you over the last few weeks? In what ways have you grown?• How has your understanding of being “Almost Christian” and “Altogether Christian” changed?• How has your understanding of “Authenticity” changed as a result of participating in this conversation?• In Gary Mason’s presentation, he mentioned that if Moses took a straw poll among the Children of Israel that he would have discovered that his leadership was considered a great bother and quite unpopular. As a leader, have you struggled with decisions that would make you either popular within the group or faithful to God? Please provide an example.• How am I called to live out God’s truth in this world?• How will you live more authentically after participating in these conversations?• What do we gain when we talk to those who are different in some way? (Note: engagement does not equal endorsement.)• How will you share this experience with others?
Next Week	Review your church’s Mission Insite report, the United Methodist Church mission statement, and your church’s vision statement.
Prayer	Finally, pray the “All Together” prayer aloud and in unison.

Questions for Additional Conversation

- What challenged you today?
- How will you resolve it?

Christian's participation in God is the essence of Christian existence. The means to this single end are: not faith alone, but humility (i.e., repentance), faith, hope and love.

John Wesley

Session 6: Reimagining Beloved Community

Goal	To reimagine the vision for the congregation with the beloved community in mind.
Scripture	Read 1 Corinthians 12. Again, underline any word or phrase that jumps out.
Prayer	Consider volunteering to pray using 1 Corinthians 12 for intercession.
This Session	Discuss the following questions from the material you received last week: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What from the Mission Insite report was helpful?• What surprised or challenged you?• What questions did it raise for you?• What ideas did it spark in you?• Does the mission and the vision statement make sense <i>for</i> your community?• Do they make sense <i>to</i> your congregation?

Next Steps

Even as you conclude this 6-week discussion, the journey continues. As an individual, complete the following statements.

To continue my personal growth in authentic witness to my faith,
In the next week I will...
In the next month, I will....
In the next three months, I will...
By this time next year, I will have....

Then, complete the following statements as a group.

To continue to grow in authentic witness in an effort to influence our larger community,
In the next week, we, as a group, will...
In the next month, we, as a group, will....
In the next three months, we, as a group, will...
By this time next year, we, as a group, will have....

Prayer Finally, pray the “All Together” prayer aloud and in unison.

Questions for Additional Conversation

- What challenged you most during this 6-week experience?
- How will you resolve it?

Who is Rev. Dr. Gary Mason?

Gary Mason is a Methodist Minister who holds a PhD from the school of Psychology at the University of Ulster. He was also awarded an honorary Doctorate in Divinity by Florida Southern College for his role in peace building in Ireland. He completed his theological studies at Queens University and holds a Bachelor's in Business Studies from the University of Ulster.

Gary is a Senior Research Fellow at the Kennedy Institute for Conflict Intervention at Maynooth University in Ireland. He is also an adjunct Professor at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. Gary is a faculty advisor to the Negotiations Strategies Institute, which is a Harvard University programme for leaders in the Israeli / Palestinian context. He has lectured in political, religious and academic forums throughout Europe, South Africa, the Middle East and the U.S.A. seeking to engage, mentor and share lessons from the Irish peace process. He has travelled widely in the USA and has spoken in Churches of all Christian denominations as well as other faith settings. Gary has also given lectures in a number of College, University and denominational settings across the United States from Harvard University, Boston College, Boston University, Tufts University, Emory University, Duke University, University of Alabama, Florida Southern College, Birmingham Southern College, Fairmont State University, Wesleyan WV, Rollins College, St. Cloud University, St. John's University Minnesota and Hamline University.

Prior to founding Rethinking Conflict, Gary spent 28 years as a clergy person in Belfast and was involved in the "Northern Irish Peace Process." He has been and continues to be a close advisor to Protestant ex-combatants on the civilianisation efforts of paramilitaries. To learn more about Rev. Dr. Mason, visit www.rethinkingconflict.com.

Who is Rev. Dr. Tonya Lawrence-Miles?

A native of Orangeburg, South Carolina, Dr. Tonya L. Miles received a Bachelor of Science in Marketing from North Carolina A&T State University. She also holds a degree in Fashion Buying and Merchandising from the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York, NY. After more than a decade in corporate retail, Dr. Miles accepted her call to ministry. In May 2010, she received dual Master's degrees in Divinity and Youth Ministry from Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, NJ. Dr. Miles earned a Doctor of Educational Ministry degree at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia in May 2016.

Dr. Miles is an ordained Elder in The United Methodist Church. She has faithfully served at various levels within the connectional system as preacher, teacher, author and leader.

Dr. Miles is currently appointed as the University Chaplain/Director in the Office of Religious Life at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta and also serves as an adjunct professor at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia.

All Together Prayer

All Together

(Please pray aloud and in unison)

Gracious and loving Lord, we give you thanks for your faithfulness, and for your unconditional love. We give you thanks for the gift of life, the graces that you have bestowed upon each of us and the ministry to which you have called each of us. As we join together in prayer, we ask that you could help us to open our hearts and our minds to hear your will and to be willing to fulfill it.

At this time when division seems more common than unity, we ask that you would draw us closer to you so that we might be the love, grace and peace that our community desperately needs. Help us on our journey to perfection so that we might be courageous enough to be altogether as we live out our faith.

Help us to see one another as goodness created by you so that we might be more authentic as we build a more beloved community together. May thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. **Amen.**

Glossary of Terms

Covenant - a solemn agreement between the members of a church to act together in harmony with the precepts of the gospel.

Grace – God’s ability to love us as we are, yet love us too much to let us stay as we are. Considered by Wesleyans to be a work of the Holy Spirit.

Toxicity - causing unpleasant feelings; harmful or malicious

Authenticity – not false or copied, genuine, real; representing one’s true nature or beliefs; true to oneself or to the person identified

Implicit - implied, rather than expressly stated

Explicit - fully and clearly expressed or demonstrated; leaving nothing merely implied; unequivocal

Contempt - an act showing such disrespect; the feeling with which a person regards anything considered mean, vile, or worthless; disdain; scorn

Personal Holiness – a personal dedication or devotion to God, practiced in the Wesleyan tradition through means of Grace and works of piety (prayer, fasting, and other spiritual disciplines)

Social Holiness – Christian friendship with the world practiced in the Wesleyan tradition through means of grace and works of mercy (service, charity, feeding, clothing, visiting, welcoming, justice-seeking)

Beloved Community – Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s Beloved Community is a global vision in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. (King Center)

Lectio Divina – a practice of scriptural reading

Agape Love – selfless love of one person for another (especially love that is spiritual in nature)