What Is a Methodist?

Who Are We, and How Did We Get Here?

Adult Bible Study — 30 Minutes

Goal

To understand how Methodism began, what Methodists believe, how Methodism came to Urbana, Ohio, and how we can continue sharing God's love today.

Opening Question (3 minutes)

Ask the class:

> *"If someone asked you, 'What does it mean to be a Methodist?' what would you say?"*

Let a few people share their answers.

Leader introduction:

Today, we are going to learn about who we are as Methodists. We will look at how Methodism started, how it came to Urbana, and what we can learn from those who came before us.

We are not going to learn everything about Methodism in one lesson. Instead, we will focus on the most important parts of our story and what they mean for us today.

Part 1: How Did Methodism Begin? (5 minutes)

Methodism began in England in the 1700s. It started as a movement within the Church of England.

Two brothers, John Wesley and Charles Wesley, were important leaders in this movement.

In 1729, John Wesley, Charles Wesley, and some other young men met regularly at Oxford University. They wanted to learn more about God and become better Christians.

They studied, prayed, and helped one another grow in their faith. They followed a regular plan for their spiritual lives.

Other people made fun of them because they were so organized. They began calling them "Methodists." The name came from the way they followed a method or plan for growing in their faith.

But the Wesley brothers believed something very important: They were Christians first.

Their main goal was to follow Jesus Christ and live according to the Gospel.

Let's Discuss

1. Why do you think the Wesley brothers wanted to meet regularly to study and grow in their faith?
2. What are some ways we can help one another become stronger Christians?
3. If someone watched how we live, would they know that following Jesus is important to us? Why or why not?

Leader takeaway: Methodism began with people who wanted to grow in their faith and help others do the same.

Part 2: What Do Methodists Believe? (5 minutes)

Methodists share the main beliefs of Christians around the world. We believe in God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Here are some important Methodist beliefs in simple words:

- **We believe in God:** God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- **We believe in Jesus:** Through Jesus, God offers us salvation.
- **We believe in the Holy Spirit:** The Holy Spirit works in our lives and in the church.
- **We believe in the Bible:** Scripture guides us in matters of faith.
- **We believe in grace:** God offers us love and forgiveness that we do not earn. We receive God's grace through faith.
- **We believe the church should keep growing:** The church must continue to learn, change where needed, and become more faithful to Jesus.
- **We believe in serving others:** Following Jesus means worshiping God, sharing the good news, and serving people.

Methodists also believe that the church is part of a much larger family of Christians. We may have different church names and traditions, but we share our faith in Jesus.

Let's Discuss

4. Which of these beliefs is especially important to you? Why?
5. What does it mean to receive God's grace instead of trying to earn His love?
6. Why is it important for a church to keep learning and growing?

Leader takeaway: Being Methodist is not just about belonging to a particular church. It is about following Jesus, trusting God's grace, learning from Scripture, and serving others.

Part 3: Baptism and Holy Communion (4 minutes)

Methodists celebrate two sacraments: baptism and Holy Communion.

A sacrament is a special act given to the church by Christ that helps us experience God's grace.

Baptism

Baptism welcomes us into the family of God. It is a sign of new life and a new beginning with God.

Methodists recognize three ways of baptizing:

- Sprinkling water
- Pouring water
- Immersing a person in water

All three are accepted. Methodists also recognize baptism performed in other Christian denominations and do not require people to be baptized again to become members.

Baptism reminds us that God is at work in our lives. It also reminds the church that we have a responsibility to support and encourage those who are baptized.

Holy Communion

Holy Communion, also called the Lord's Supper, reminds us of Jesus and His love for us.

During Communion, we remember Christ's life, death, and resurrection. We also share in a special way with Christ and with one another.

Methodists have an open table. This means the invitation is not limited to members of our particular church. The invitation is for those who love Christ, sincerely turn away from sin, and seek to live in peace with others.

Let's Discuss

7. What does baptism remind us about God's love?
8. How can our church help people grow in faith after they are baptized?
9. Why is it meaningful to share Communion with other believers?

Leader takeaway: Baptism and Communion remind us of God's grace and our connection to Jesus and one another.

Part 4: How Did Methodism Come to Urbana? (7 minutes)

Did you know that Methodists were in the Urbana area before Urbana officially became a town?

Here is a look at our local history.

- **1804 — The first Methodist circuit rider arrived.** A circuit rider was a traveling preacher who went from one settlement to another on horseback. He carried a Bible and the supplies he needed. He preached, encouraged Christians, baptized new believers, served Communion, and married couples. He also carried news from one settlement to another. Because he visited only every few months, local lay leaders helped keep the people connected and growing in faith.
- **1807 — The first Methodist class was formed.** Only 11 people met together in the home of John Reynolds. They wanted to worship and grow in their faith.
- **1811 — The first Methodist church was built.** The people of Urbana built a small log church. The seats were made from split logs, and candles provided light. Imagine worshiping in that building during the winter! The church was more than a place to worship. Between 1811 and 1817, the Ohio Supreme Court also held sessions there.
- **1816 — A larger church was needed.** Urbana was growing, and the church had become too small. A two-story brick building was planned.
- **1830 — A powerful storm damaged the church.** The congregation had to meet in the courthouse for a time.
- **1835 — The church moved to the corner of Church and Main Streets.** This is the location where the congregation described in our history remains today.

Later, another Methodist church was built in Urbana as the community continued to grow. In 1923, the two churches joined together.

The stained-glass windows in the sanctuary remember people who helped shape the church's history, including John and Jane Reynolds, Dan and Sarah Warnock, the Hitts, and the Corwins.

Think about that: Our church's story began with just 11 people meeting in a home. Through the years, people worshiped, served, built, rebuilt, and worked together to keep their faith alive.

Let's Discuss

10. What stands out to you most about Urbana's Methodist history?
11. What do you think it took for those first 11 people to build a church?
12. What can we learn from the people who continued worshiping even after their church was damaged by a storm?
13. How can we make sure that our church continues to serve people in the years ahead?

Leader takeaway: Our church did not become what it is today overnight. It grew because people cared about their faith and worked together.

Part 5: What Does This Mean for Us Today? (4 minutes)

The world has changed greatly since the first Methodists met in England and the first Methodist class gathered in Urbana.

But people today still face difficult questions. We see violence, suffering, poverty, and death. Sometimes it is hard to understand how a loving and powerful God can allow such things to happen.

Our Methodist history reminds us that earlier Christians also faced change and hardship. They did not have all the answers, but they continued to trust God and follow Jesus.

We can do the same. Our study reminds us that God is with us in the past, the present, and the future. Through the Bible, the Holy Spirit, and the support of other believers, we can continue to learn and grow.

We can show God's love by:

- Reading and studying the Bible.
- Encouraging one another in faith.
- Serving people who need help.
- Welcoming others into the church.
- Working together through difficult times.
- Preparing the way for future generations.

The people who came before us planted seeds that helped the church grow. Now it is our turn to plant seeds for those who will come after us.

Let's Discuss

14. What is one way our church can show God's love to our community?
15. What do you hope people will remember about our church 50 years from now?
16. What is one thing you can do to help the next generation grow in faith?

Leader takeaway: We are part of a story that began long before us and will continue long after us. We have a responsibility to share our faith and God's love with others.

Closing (2 minutes)

Remember These Three Things

17. We are Christians first. Our main purpose is to follow Jesus Christ.
18. We are part of a long history. Our Methodist church in Urbana began with a small group of people who wanted to grow in their faith.
19. Our story is not finished. We can continue sharing God's love and preparing the way for future generations.

Final Question

"If someone asked you now, 'What does it mean to be a Methodist?' how would you answer?"

Invite a few people to share what they learned.

Closing Prayer

Dear God,

Thank You for the people who came before us and helped build our church. Thank You for John and Charles Wesley and for the 11 people who first gathered in Urbana to grow in their faith.

Help us to follow Jesus, learn from Your Word, and show Your love to others. Give us the courage to face challenges and the wisdom to help our church grow. May we plant seeds of faith that will bless people for many years to come.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Leader Note

The times are estimates and total 30 minutes. Allow room for discussion, since sharing personal experiences is an important part of an adult study.