

Personal experience of god



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

1. Describe your personal experience of God and the understanding of God you derived from biblical, theological, and historical sources.

Throughout history, people developed the idea of a higher being, who is referred to as 'god' in general. Some people simply deny the existence of god or any other spiritual being. And other people who accepted the existence of 'god' explained the identity of 'god' in various ways. Deism sees the cosmos as a closed system with its maker outside it; so denies God's direct control of events and his miraculous intrusions into this world. Pantheism recognizes no creator-creature distinction, but sees everything, including good and evil, as a direct form of God.

Christianity joins with the Jewish and the Muslim faiths in proclaiming radical monotheism, which states that God is One and that God is the God of all. Distinctive to Christian theism is the belief that the personal creator is as truly three as he is one. God is a single being who exists, simultaneously and eternally, as a communion of three persons: Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The three Godhead are eternal which means they coexist from past through future. In Matthew's account of Christ's baptism, as Jesus the Son went up from the water, the Spirit of God descended upon Him as a dove and the Father testified from the heaven of His beloved Son (Mt 3: 16-17). This scene clearly portrays the simultaneous existence of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.

The Christian understanding of God is specific in that Christians believe that God has been, and continues to be, historically involved with the people of Israel and has made a new covenant with all people in Jesus Christ. In other

words, we believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments bear witness to God's active love for creation as revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.

God revealed himself through various channels including the Scripture, experiences and nature. Although there are many ways in which God reveals God's self, the best place to find out about God is through the Scripture that God gave us. In the book of Exodus, I personally found God's character and the qualities that are ascribed to him. Exodus 3: 7-8 says that

The LORD said, " I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt . I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. (NIV)

These are the words that God said to Moses from the burning bush. I believe that in this communication with Moses, God revealed who he was. God whom I believe in is the God who has *seen* the misery of his people, *heard* them crying out and has been *concerned* about their suffering. In another translation, it is said that God *knew* their suffering (NRSV). In the context of this chapter, " my people" indicate Israel people in Egypt. Israel people at that time in Egypt were slaves under the Pharaoh. They were ignored people in bondage to the Egyptians. There must have been other nations considered much higher and nobler than the Israelites but the bible said that God who is the creator of the whole world saw slaves with his own eyes and heard them crying out.

Hebrew word for 'to know' in Exodus 3: 8 is 'yada` {yaw-dah}' and it implies to know by experience (Bible Work 7). In other words, God who created the whole world attentively observed and listened to slaves who were disregarded in this world and he knew of their suffering by experience. The God whom I believe in is not one who just sits on a throne in heaven and is not concerned about what happens in this world. But God in Christianity is the God who knows his people and has a close relationship with them.

Exodus story indicates that God is purposeful, powerful, and sovereign in relation to this world. He has a plan for the history of the universe, which is to save his people from sins, and in executing it he governs and controls all created world. He is all powerful so he cannot be bound by any of the limitations of space or time that apply to us and he is always present everywhere.

Personally, God has been there in many forms for me. All of these attributes can be found in many parts of my personal experience with God. I have experienced God of Immanuel, who has been with me always. Jesus came to this world as Immanuel (Mt. 1: 23) and his last words before he ascended into heaven was also Immanuel, " *I am with you always, to the very end of the age* " (Mt. 28: 20). When I decided to go to seminary in Korea to be a pastor, I rejoiced in confidence because God was there with me. When I went to Korean Army, I endured the difficult time because God was there with me. When I came to America alone for further study, I did not fear to live in a strange land because God was there with me always. Throughout my life, the one thing that I am sure is that God has been always with me and loves me, who am the weakest among all.

2. What is your understanding of evil as it exists in the world?

First of all, as Augustine said in his article, '*On the nature of good*', I believe that 'God is good and every creation is good' (Augustine, Chapter 34). And every creature came to exist by God without exception. Then how do we explain the origin of evil from the perfect good Creator? In regard to the matter of the origin of evil, I am of the same opinion with Augustine.

Evil is lack of some good things. As it throws a shadow over us when we turn against the Sun, evil originate from a lack of goodness of God.

I believe that God is the perfect Creator. One of the perfect things God created was man. Adam and Eve who were the perfect creature of God had a choice to follow God or to go against God. Without free will to choose, neither good nor evil could have been chosen. If man is ever to choose good, he must have the freedom to choose evil as well. Therefore, God did not create evil but perfect freedom to choose and human freely chose evil. After Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, evil became a reality in this world.

In his Book, '*the City of God*', Augustine recognized that evil in this world and goodness of God's Kingdom co-exist on the earth throughout its history. However, Augustine believed that God would finally turn evil in this world into goodness of God's Kingdom (Augustine, Chapter 13. 4). By the original sin, I believe, all of us fell down from the image of God and evil came to prevail in us. However God also prepared the way through which we can be restored to God's Image and be saved from our sins. The only way of salvation is Jesus Christ.

3. What is your understanding of humanity, and the human need for divine grace?

On the last day of creation, God said, “ *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness* ” (Gen. 1: 26). The image of God refers to the immaterial part of man. We were created to be set apart for God (Gen 1: 28). He enabled us to commune with God. We were created in likeness mentally, morally, and socially. When we were created in God’s image, we were intended to become God’s agent so that we can take care of the world (Gen. 1: 26, 28).

However, Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God. And they became alienated from the Creator. That historic event brought all mankind under divine condemnation. Human nature became corrupt, and therefore, totally unable to please God. Before Adam and Eve sinned, they both had direct contact and fellowship with God. But as a result of transgressing against God, Adam and Eve lost it all. They were both banished out of the garden, God pronounced a curse on them and their descendants and on the earth in general. Death entered into the big picture and all of us are born into this world with sinful nature.

In his love and grace, God made a plan to save us. In Ephesians 2: 4-7, Apostle Paul tells us that “ *God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions* “. We cannot overcome our sinful nature and death but, through Jesus Christ, God had already made provision for us to be saved. By faith through grace, we can be saved (Eph. 2: 8-9). Jesus Christ is the grace of God who showed us the way of salvation. By dying on the cross, Jesus paid the full and complete price for our sins so that we do not have to

pay for it. The only way of salvation is by faith through Jesus Christ. And even the faith we have comes from God. Thus our salvation is entirely the work of God. Whoever believes in Jesus Christ will be saved by the grace of God.

4. How do you interpret the statement “ Jesus Christ is Lord”?

“ *Jesus* ” is our Lord’s human and personal name, meaning savior. “ *Christ* ” is our Lord’s official title. It is the Greek synonym for the Hebrew “ Messiah,” meaning the Anointed One.

The statement “ Jesus Christ is Lord” implies the belief that Jesus who was born of the Virgin Mary is our savior who redeems us from our sins. In other words, to accept Jesus Christ as Lord means to accept two natures in Jesus Christ; the nature of divinity and the nature humanity. Jesus Christ is fully human and fully God at the same time. Existence of these two different natures in Jesus Christ is crucial because that matters to salvation.

The doctrine of the virgin birth is very important (Isaiah 7: 14, Matthew 1: 23, Luke 1: 27, 34). Jesus’ birth was the result of the Holy Spirit working within Mary’s body. Mary was a ‘ vessel’ God used to perform the miracle of the Incarnation. Denying a physical connection between Mary and Jesus would imply that Jesus was not truly human. Scripture teaches us that Jesus was fully human with a physical body like ours. Jesus was fully God as well as he is fully human with an eternal and sinless nature (John 1: 14, Acts 20: 28, Hebrews 2: 14-17). Jesus was not born with sinful nature. The virgin birth circumvented the transmission of the sinful nature and allowed the eternal God to become a perfect man.

The deity of Christ is the central belief of Christianity as well as Jesus' humanity. The bible clearly claimed that Jesus had the right to forgive sins, which is something only God can do (Mark 2: 5-7, Acts 5: 31, Colossians 3: 13). Jesus was also said to be the one who will " judge the living and the dead" (2 Timothy 4: 1) as an ultimate judge of this world. Apostle Paul called Jesus " great God and Savior" (Titus 2: 13), and pointed out Jesus' existence in the form of God prior to his incarnation (Philippians 2: 5-8). In John 1: 1, deity of Christ is clarified as the same God with Father, " *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* " (John 1: 1). John here affirms both the deity of Christ and the Trinity. Jesus is God who incarnated in human flesh, the living Word of God.

5. What is your conception of the activity of the Holy Spirit in personal faith, in the community of believers, and in responsible living in the world?

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune God. The Holy Spirit is God in the same way that the Father is God and the Son is God. Scripture and the church tradition, including Nicene Creed (" *We believe in the Holy Spirit ... who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified* "), indicates that the Holy Spirit, known also as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Jesus Christ, is of the same essence as the Father and the Son.

The Holy Spirit worked at the beginning of a church. Apostle Paul indicated an organism of a church as the Spirit baptized body of Christ (1 Cor. 12: 13). And the one who leads us to become a new creation in Christ through worship is the Spirit of God (Eph. 2: 18, Phil. 3: 3). Each local gathering is a

part of this one universal believing community as a body of Christ, and as Christ's agent the Holy Spirit leads and guide us to grow into Christlike maturity and fulfill God's mission (Eph. 4: 11-16).

The Spirit also works in a life of an individual believer. The Holy Spirit convicts lost people with respect to sin, righteousness, and judgment and by God's power repentant and believing souls are saved. In sanctification, Holy Spirit indwells the Christian as one grows in the likeness of Christ and in his service. Scriptures tells us the Spirit who works throughout our journey of salvation. The Spirit leads us to repent our sins (John 16: 7), makes us born again (John 3: 3-5). And the Spirit empowers us to bring holiness in our life and helps us to bear fruits in our life (Galatians 5: 22-23).

6. What is your understanding of the kingdom of God; the Resurrection; eternal life?

As the Psalmist confessed, "*Your Kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations*" (Ps. 145: 13), I believe that God is the king of his covenant people. And as Apostles' Creed ("*from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead*") and the Nicene Creed ("*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead*") said, I believe that Christ will be our ultimate judge at the last day and God will reign over the whole world. As the Nicene Creed stated coming of God's Kingdom ("*his kingdom will have no end*"), there must be the coming kingdom of God in the future in which God's reign affects the whole world.

However, the Kingdom of God is more than a vision of coming God's reign in the future. The kingdom of God speaks of a present reality though not in

entirety and a future result where the reign of God over all of creation will be perfected and made whole. In Luke 17: 20-21, Jesus responds to a Pharisee who asked when the kingdom of God would come, “ *The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say here it is or there it is because the kingdom of God is within you .*” As well as we experience coming of God’s reign over the world in the future, we will experience the Kingdom of God here and now although it is a foretastes of the fullness of God’s Kingdom.

The resurrection of Christ on the third day after his crucifixion and his ascension to be with God until He comes again for the final time of judgment also marks the path of all those who claim faith in Christ. At the time when the Good News of Jesus Christ spreads to the whole nations, he will surely come to the world again (Mt. 24: 14) from the heaven in a cloud with power and glory (1 Thessalonians 4: 16). At that time people who accepted Jesus Christ as their savior will be risen from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4: 15-16). Christ’s resurrection marked Christ’s victory over sin and death both physically and spiritually, we too as Christians who bear the marks of Christ gain the right to have the same victory both physically and spiritually.

Eternal life is the end product of our resurrected souls. As the Apostles’ Creed (“ *the life everlasting*”) and the Nicene Creed (“ *the life of the world to come*”) insisted, I believe that those who have been saved by Christ will share the joy of eternal fellowship with Christ. Heaven means eternal joy in Christ and those who reject Christ will be judged to the eternal condemnation.

7. Explain the role and significance of baptism in the ministry to which you have been called.

Sacraments are acts instituted by Christ and administered by a church having an outward form and conveying God's grace. Baptism is one of two United Methodist sacraments the other is the Lord's Supper. These sacraments are means of grace within the covenant community. They are visible signs and seals of something internal and invisible and the means by which God works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The scriptural mode of baptism is found in the New Testament. It records that Jesus was baptized by John (Mt. 3: 13-17), and he commanded his disciples to teach and baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28: 19). Whoever accepts Jesus Christ as their savior is eligible to be baptized. Baptism conveys God's grace that redeems us from our sins through the atonement of Christ. Therefore, baptizing of a person, whether as an infant or an adult, is a sign of God's saving grace. In baptism, we witness that God's grace is poured upon everybody regardless of their condition.

Even though baptism is the special channel through which we experience God's grace of the atonement of Christ, baptism does not guarantee our salvation. As John Wesley insisted in his sermon, "*Scripture Way of Salvation*", salvation is a lifelong process of responding to God's grace. By being baptized, we become a covenant people of God who have a promise that the Holy Spirit will work in our lives. However, salvation is not automatically

obtained by baptism but by accepting Christ as our savior, trust in Christ and grow in holiness to be near unto God.

Baptism represents an act of initiation for Christian believers into the Church. By being baptized, we make a covenant of relationship between God and also between congregations in a church. As baptized Christians, we join the universal church and make a promise our loyalty as the body of Christ.

8. Explain the role and significance of the Lord's Supper in the ministry to which you have been called.

God provides us various ways in which we can grow in God's grace. The Lord's Supper, also known as Communion, or Eucharist, is one of the Christ's gifts to the church, in which we experience God's grace. Following Jesus' example and instruction, when the church celebrates the Lord's Supper we receive gifts of bread and wine. In this sacrament, we celebrate our fellowship with Christ and with each other.

The invitation to the Table comes from the risen and present Christ. In United Methodist, whoever loves him, repents their sins, and seeks to live as a Christian disciple is invited to participate in the Lord's Supper. By responding to this invitation we affirm and deepen our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

It is not easy to understand how bread and wine become Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper. So it is mystery. Some churches insist that the Lord's Supper is merely a memorial of Christ's sacrifice and a sign of Christian fellowship. Some churches including historic Reformed churches

insist that bread and wine in Communion conveys a unique spiritual power although Christ's body ascended into heaven. Lutheran churches insist that Christ's actual body is present with the elements of bread and wine. And the Roman Catholic churches insist that even the essence of bread and wine are changed into Christ's true body and blood, with maintaining their physical reality persisting (transubstantiation). United Methodist believes that the real presence of Christ is communicated to the believers.

To participate in the Lord's Supper is not merely to recall the event 2000 years ago. But when we receive bread and wine with faith, it becomes dynamic action within us and we experience the grace of body and blood of Christ which is re-presented to us in the Lord's Supper. The past event of our Lord's death, resurrection and ascension comes into the present so that its power once again touches us, changes us, and heals us.

We gather at the table with joy. Our eating and drinking is a celebration of our risen Lord. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ is present with us at the table and so we give joyful thanks for what God has done and is doing in our lives and in the world. We come to the table in hope. We look forward with joyful anticipation to the coming reign of God.

9. How do you intend to affirm, teach and apply Part II of the Discipline (Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task) in your work in the ministry to which you have been called?

What we believe as Christians matters. What we believe tells us who we are. Part II of *the Book of Discipline* contains Methodist heritage in faith and theology and heart of Methodist doctrines. In other words, Part II of *the Book*
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of Discipline tells us who we are as Christians, particularly Methodists. It is important for Methodists to study this in order for us to have a clear understanding of our heritage, doctrine, and the faith we profess together. Our Christian faith is built on tradition which fathers in faith handed over to us. We will also add our profession of faith upon it and turn it over to the next generation. Therefore, as a pastor, to lead people into right direction to Christian faith by affirming and teaching what we believe and who we are is crucial.

In order to fulfill this mission, I will preach the gospel verified in our tradition and theology. A pastor should not preach the gospel according to his or her own theology but we should profess communal faith built upon tradition. Through preaching and small group study, I will teach Methodist heritage. To learn who our fathers of faith were and what they believed will help us to know our identity and to understand the place where I am now. On the basis of our tradition, we should do our best to leave our footmarks so that our children can see and follow faith of their parents and go in the right direction. To leave footmarks of our faith is to teach our children and show them how to live out what we profess in our lives. I will teach our children the Methodist heritage and doctrine in Sunday School at a level they can understand.

10. The United Methodist Church holds that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason. What is your understanding of this theological position of the Church?

The scripture is the primary source of Christian faith. It is clear that the Scripture is the primary vehicle by which we grow in faith. The scripture has great authority in teaching and guiding us in faithful living and right understanding as to the nature of God and humanity. All the scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3: 16). When we read the bible, the Holy Spirit guides us to find the truth which illuminates our life.

Church tradition is an important practice for theological reflection and interpretation of the Scripture. Christian faith has built upon our ancestors' confessions of faith for a long period of time, and that formed church tradition. Tradition is a source of authority and a lens through which Scripture is interpreted inside it.

Experience is an important practice for Christian faith because the scripture and theology must be understood on the basis of our experiences.

Communal experience within a faith community helps us to understand God's word toward us here and now.

Reason is used to examine authenticity of theological reflection and an interpretation of the scripture. By reason we ask questions of faith and seek to understand God's action and will. However, reason as a practice for Christian faith does not mean to have a speculative thought but it indicates to conceive under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Wesley's quadrilateral indicates the importance of checks and balances between four practices. To focus upon one practice brings danger to a church to lose its balance and have a radical view on Christian faith. Thus, to

keep the balance between these four practices, with holding primacy of the scripture, is crucial.

11. Describe the nature and mission of the Church. What are its primary tasks today?

In regard to the nature of the church, I agree with the Nicene Creed which describes the church as “ *one holy catholic and apostolic* .” The church, in this case, meaning universal Christian church, is one in Christ. The church is *holy* so it is called apart from the secular world. Although only the part of holiness is seen at the church in the present time, we will see the fullness of holiness at the time of coming of Christ in the end. The Church is *universal* for all people. As it is written in 1 Cor. 12: 27, Church is likened to the Body of Christ whereby the coming together of the various parts form one perfect and organic body with Christ as the head. This analogy means that the church will embrace both the fullness of Christian teaching and the diversity of people who make up the church and function as the each parts of the body. The church is *apostolic* so it stands in continuity with the apostolic witness.

I believe that the mission of the church can be found at *the Twenty-five Articles of Religion* which indicates three necessary elements of the church: faith (“ *congregation of faithful men* “), preaching (“ *in which the pure Word of God is preached* “) and sacrament (“ *and the Sacrament duly administered* “) (13th Article of Religion, 1784). The church is the gathering of people of faith, spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ, and administers sacraments.

The ultimate goal of the church should be to make people disciples of Jesus Christ. Through preaching, teaching, worship, and nurturing, the Church is God's ordained vehicle whereby others can be disciplined and experience the grace in which we stand as the body of Christ.

The primary task of the Church today is to be a true mission church. As the body of Christ, bound to God and to one another through Christ, church always lives in a community. To lose dynamic organism of a church means to lose its vital power. A part which is not united with the whole is useless. For that reason, a local church should be connected with people and groups around it and be united with the universal church spiritually. If a church is connected and united, it should be transformative. If a church has a vital organic power, it will transform the world in which they live as a living plant bears fruits. God being connected to us came down in the form of flesh to dwell among us. Jesus' ministry was to preach the Good News and to live out the message of love with people around him. The church that truly impacts people's life is the church that knows people around her, shares joys and sorrows of the people, and give them hope in Jesus Christ.

12. Describe your understanding of the primary characteristics of United Methodist polity.

First, the system, known as "itinerancy", is the most distinguishing feature of Methodism. In many polities ministers are "called", but in Methodist polity they are "sent". One consequence of this system is that local congregations are generally receptive to whoever minister is sent. This gives ministry an objective quality that is not dependent on the personal characters of

individuals or the expectations of parishes. One of the most valuable consequences of this polity is the relative success that United Methodist Church has had in placing women and minorities in parish situation.

Second, United Methodist Church determines church policy in conferences, which function as deliberative bodies. There are several levels of such conferences. The annual conference is the basic corporate body of which the primary function is to connect local churches to one another. All ordinations take place at the annual conference. The highest deliberative body in Methodism is the General Conference. The conference legislates general policy for the church as a whole. The annual conferences are grouped geographically into the jurisdictional conference, of which there are presently five in the US. Central conferences are concerned with the work of the church outside the US. Churches within a specific area of an annual conference may assemble in district conferences. Annual meetings among local congregations or groups of contingent congregations, to which a member of an annual conference is assigned, are known as charge conference.

Third, one of the unique features of Methodist governance is a structure of official leadership through which the supervisory function takes place. The executive function of the bishop includes a number of powers-particularly associated with the appointment of clergy to charges. The bishop works through district superintendents. They act as liaisons between the local parishes and the bishop. The several district superintendents in a conference are called the bishop's cabinet. The district superintendent presides at the charge conferences.

Fourth, an involvement of lay people in the deliberative and legislative bodies of the church has been important. Governance in contemporary Methodism is a shared responsibility of clergy and lay people. Lay preachers and lay leaders continue to work in local churches.