

As many of you know, I have an identical twin brother. We were both baptized as infants at Day Memorial Methodist Church in San Angelo, Texas. Our dad was an Air Force jet pilot instructor there, and our Mom was from that West Texas small town. Mom told us later, that at our baptism, she had prayed that one of us would be a doctor and the other a preacher. She was half right; we both became preachers.

I grew up in the Methodist Church, and as an Air Force family, we attended many Methodist churches through the years, as well as base chapels. But somehow, I got through the whole thing with minimal faith. In the Navy, I came to Christ in a personal way and was baptized again by immersion, believer's baptism it was called. It was a big deal at the time.

But as the years have gone by, my baptism as an infant – when my parents presented me to God and His Church, made promises and placed me in the arms of God's prevenient grace – has become more and more important to me. For it is here where I see and have experienced the fullness of God's grace in a purely Wesleyan way, one of the strengths and positives of the Methodist Church.

When we are working to grow our church, there are many tools and themes that can help us. One that I think we neglect is the purely Wesleyan strengths and positives that set the Methodist Church apart from others. Now I want God to bless all churches, Methodist and otherwise, yet we know that our churches do "*compete*" with other churches, especially new non-denominational churches and even other traditional churches. When we fail to elevate what we do the best – celebrate it, preach it, and emphasize it – we do ourselves a disfavor.

Infant baptism, confirmation, free will, basics of grace – prevenient, justifying, sanctifying, and the amazing means of grace called Communion, the Great Thanksgiving or the Lord's Supper – our emphasis on serving our communities, these are some of the foundational practices and/or sacraments of the United Methodist Church. When we elevate what makes the Methodist Church unique, how it helps people grow in grace and powerful ways, how the

milestones of our journey include infant baptism and confirmation and what this can mean in the life of our children and their family, we strengthen our church. When we tell why we have Communion regularly and how we experience God in this sacrament and the ongoing story of what makes a Methodist Church unique, biblical, and a place of choice to grow in faith and raise a family, we strengthen our church. The connection our members and attendees have with the church, why new people might want to connect with this Wesleyan journey of discipleship and why staying for the long haul bears important spiritual benefits, we strengthen our church.

People should know the difference between a Wesleyan and Calvinistic church, the difference between a free-will, grace-centered church and a legalistic one:

- Teach classes on the strengths of our church;
- Preach sermons on the positives of our church;
- Prepare resources on the biblical, orthodox and historical nature of our church;
- Place on your website why the Methodist Church is the best choice among many churches;
- Helping people know the difference can make all the difference.