



FREE TO BE

Children's Ministry Curriculum
and Resources about our History and Identity as
the Free Methodist Church

This curriculum is designed for Free Methodist churches to use to teach children what it means to be a Christian in the Free Methodist Church. Each lesson focuses on one aspect of our denomination's identity and history. These four lessons could be used for a 4-8 week focused time of teaching, as stand-alone lessons, or to supplement any curriculum or event. (For example, you may choose to use Lesson 2 (Free to be Equal) on Freedom Sunday.) We also tried to jam pack these lessons with lots of ideas for you to use any time throughout the year to create opportunities for your children and their families to engage in learning and serving.

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All Scriptures quoted are NIV 2011, unless otherwise noted.

GOD VALUES ALL PEOPLE.

Key Lesson Element: *The Story of B.T. Roberts and the beginning of the Free Methodist Church*

Core Scriptures: *Genesis 1:27; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-16, 19; John 17:21-23*

Suggested Lesson Plan

We have intentionally provided multiple activity options. Choose whichever you think will work best for your time, space, and students' learning styles.

Elements that we think are essential to this lesson are marked with an asterisk.

- **Choose one or two intro activity options.**
- **Read and engage children in the story of B.T. Roberts and the beginning of the Free Methodist Church.**
- **Discuss questions as a large group or in smaller groups.**
- **Choose one or more activities.**
- **Be sure to send home take-home materials.**

Suggested Supplies

Intro Activities

- ***Pay for that Pew*** Various seating options (i.e. lavish or comfortable chairs to uncomfortable, bare chairs), play money, snacks (optional)
- ***What does a Free Methodist look like?*** Print "Worldwide Free Methodist Church" document, or find a way to display "FM World Outreach History" Powerpoint, and/or photos and country information from "FM World Missions Statistics and Photos" folder and find a large world map poster or shower curtain. (All files are located in Additional Resources folder)

Story of B.T. Roberts: *Pictures available in the additional resources folder*

Activity Options

- ***What does the Bible say about all this?*** Bibles or printed Bible handouts
- ***Dividing Wall of Hostility*** wall of newsprint, boxes, or other material you can write on and markers
- ***Meet Eliza Suggs*** Pictures available in Resource folder
- ***EQUAL*** posterboard sheets and markers
- ***Just Jesus*** 2 glow sticks per child

Take Home Papers

FREE TO BE EQUAL

Intro Activities

**Choose one or more intro activities that will engage your students*

Pay for that Pew (10-15 minutes)

Before students enter, prepare the worship space with different seating options.

Comfortable, special seating at the front to bare, uncomfortable seating (or standing area) in the back of the room. Each seating row, or seating area, should be marked with a certain dollar amount the more lavish/comfortable/front, the more expensive.

As students enter the worship space, each student is randomly assigned an amount of play money (such as \$10, \$5, \$2, \$1 or \$500, \$100, \$50, depending on your play money) and should be told to go sit in the area that matches their dollar amount.

(You may also choose to hand out limited dollars, so those that don't get any money have to sit in the back area.)

[Additional Option: Select a few students from the back area to come forward and handout snacks to the group, but tell them they cannot keep a snack for themselves. The snacks are for everyone else and not for them.]

Ask: What do you think of this seating arrangement? Do you think it's a good idea?

What's good about it? What's bad about it? Do you think it's fair? Can you tell who has a lot of money and who does not? Do you think you would want to come to "our church" if you were poor?

Explain that during the 1800s it was common practices for churches to make money by selling seats. Everyone knew who the rich were as they could afford to sit in the front. Those who were poor would have to sit on uncomfortable benches in the very back, if they were even allowed in at all. In 1860, B.T. Roberts and others liked him believed that seats should be free. After all, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, had wanted to reach the poor and include them in the church. This was one of the reasons why B.T. Roberts and others founded the Free Methodist Church. We are going to learn more about B.T. Roberts today and how one of the reasons our Free Methodist church began was to bring FREEDOM through equality.

What does a Free Methodist look like? (10-15 minutes)

- o Study maps and data from the global FMC Church to discover its global diversity and richness. (For example, how many Free Methodists or Free Methodist churches there are in various countries around the world.) Look at "Worldwide Free Methodist Church" document or display "FM World Outreach History" Powerpoint. Both files are located in Additional Resources folder.)
- o Find a large map (such as a shower curtain map) and print out pictures from Free Methodist churches and organizations around the world. Have kids fill in map with pictures, locating the country of the picture's origin. A small variety of pictures (*about 10 countries*) are available to you in the resource folder, but many more pictures, stories, and facts can be found at **fmcusa.org/fmmissions**.

Note: If your church is connected in any way to a country around the world (such as a family member, missionary, or mission project) be sure to include this country in your project.

Ask: After looking at all of this data and many pictures, what does the average Free Methodist “look like?” How are all Free Methodists from around the world different? How are we the same?

Explain: The Free Methodist Church started in 1860 in New York. Although the church started in the United States, the heart and mission of its leaders (the gospel for ALL people) would soon mean that the church would expand outside the U.S. Today, more than 90% of Free Methodists are from outside the United States. Today we are going to learn more about the Free Methodist Church’s beginning and its mission for freedom, justice, and equality.

***The Story of B.T. Roberts & the beginning of the Free Methodist Church (5-10 minutes)**

Read: Benjamin Titus Roberts was born in New York State in 1823. B.T. came to Christ at the age of 21 and felt called into ministry. He became a pastor in the Methodist Episcopal Church, rooted in the Wesleyan tradition. In the 1850s, B.T. became concerned about some of the church’s common practices. One of these practices that troubled B.T. Roberts was the renting out of pews. People with a lot of money were able to pay for pews closer to the altar, while others could only afford pews in the back of the church. B.T. didn’t like how this made it obvious that some people had more money than others. It also greatly disturbed him that the church was unwilling to take a stand against slavery, a major issue of the day.

B.T. spoke out against these things, among other things, such as his desire to see the church in a deeper walk with God and bring the gospel to the hurting world outside the church walls; he even wrote many articles about these many issues. B.T. believed that the church needed get back to its Methodist roots and the teachings of John Wesley. The church, however, was unwilling to change and church leaders became so upset with B.T. that they kicked him out. Soon after, B.T. and other friends who felt the same way he did, met together in a New York apple orchard and decided to begin a new denomination.

They agreed with Methodism, the theology and tradition of the church they had been a part of, and knew they wanted to continue to focus on holy living and caring for the poor. (Do you remember many of these teachings from John Wesley?) However, their new identity would be rooted in their belief that all are “free” to be equal. Their new church would have free pews, fight for slavery to be abolished (to bring freedom to the slaves), and would encourage people to be free to worship as they were comfortable.

There, in an apple orchard in Pekin, New York in 1860, the Free Methodist church was born. The Free Methodist denomination would continue to expand across the U.S. and beyond as Free Methodist missionaries felt called to spread the good news of the gospel overseas. Still today, Free Methodist missionaries travel around the world to encourage thousands of Free Methodist pastors, leaders, and churches around the world! The Free Methodist church is also still very active in the fight against modern-day slavery, both in the U.S. and around the world, through the Set Free Movement and organizations like International Childcare Ministries, SEED, and others.

***Discussion Questions** (5-10 minutes)

1. How does knowing the history of our church encourage you? What do you like best about our story?
2. Why, as Christians, do we believe that all people are equal? (Genesis 1:26-27)
3. What is one way that our church helps the poor? Or fights for equality and justice?
4. How does it make you feel to know that our church is not the only Free Methodist church but that we are a part of the global Free Methodist church?
5. What is something we could do together to make sure we are working toward equality for everyone?
6. How do we treat others, since we are part of the family of God (and the Free Methodist Church)? Why is this important?

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

Activity Options

Choose one or more activities that will engage your students.

- **What does the Bible say about all this?** (10 minutes) Break children into small groups and give each group one of our core verses. (Galatians 3:28; Genesis 1:27; Ephesians 2:14, Ephesians 2:19; John 17:21-23) Have them look up the verse and discuss what it teaches about equality and justice. Then, have each group come up with a way to share the verse with the group, such as a poster or song.
- **Dividing Wall of Hostility** (20-25 minutes) Create a wall of newsprint, cardboard boxes, or some other material. Play a game to help children understand how the wall divides us. Have children choose a side of the wall as you make them choose between two options such as a favorite food or baseball team. Then change it up and divide them up by things they cannot choose such as gender, birthday month, or where they live.

While the group is still divided, **ASK** what if you only brought the good news to one side of the dividing wall? For example, only those with birthdays January through June were told the good news about Jesus? How would that make each side feel? Would that be fair? Do you think that's what God wants?

Explain how in our history, and even in our world today, sometimes we allow differences and divisions to determine who is more important or who deserves to hear the good news, **OR** we separate ourselves from other believers because of our differences. Encourage students individually or in small groups to consider what kinds of things divide us. What makes us different from one another? What differences come between us? For example, the color of our skin, the teams we cheer for, our nationality, rich/poor, male/female, how much money we make, etc, etc. Next, have individuals or groups write these divisions on the wall.

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

FREE TO BE EQUAL

READ Ephesians 2:11-16 together.

EXPLAIN how at one time the Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians did not get along. However, in his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds that it doesn't matter where they came from. What matters is that both have been made new through Jesus' blood. He has destroyed the dividing wall and brings everyone together. In him, we are all one.

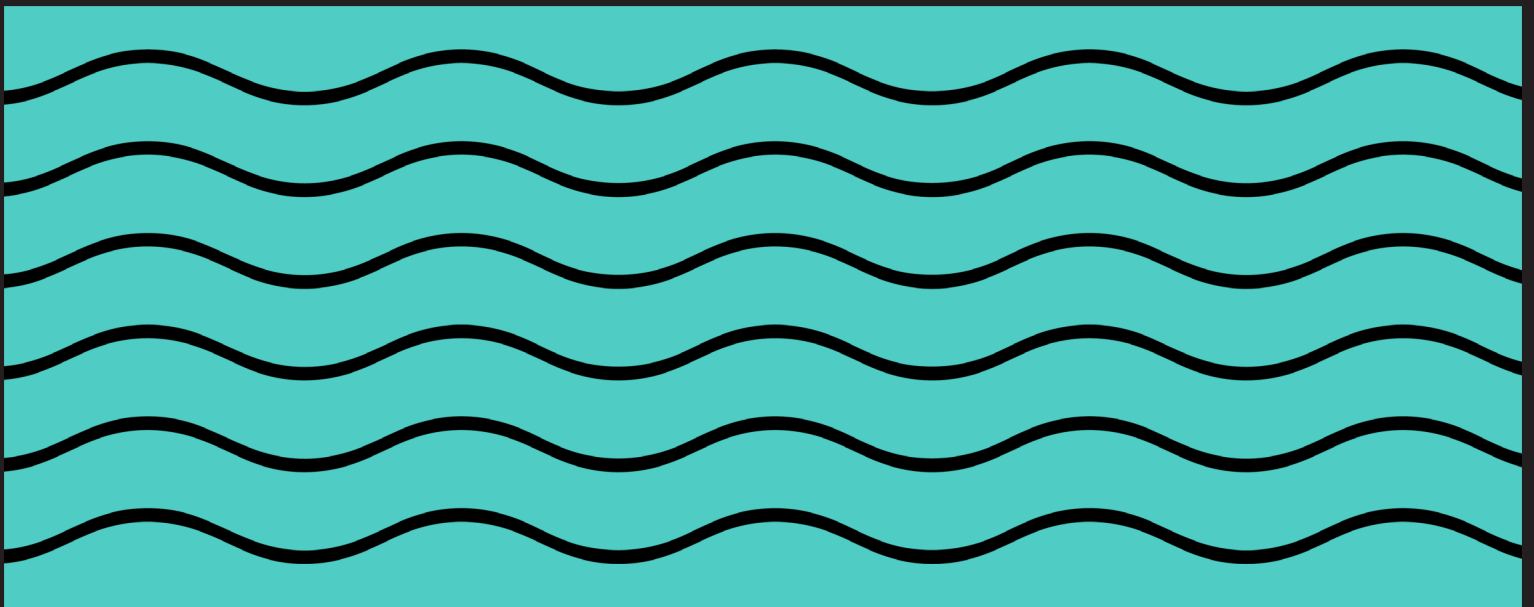
TEAR DOWN the wall together to signify that there is no longer anything that divides us. OR, if you build the wall out of cardboard boxes or blocks, transform the boxes/blocks into a cross to remember that our identity in Christ is more important than what makes us different.

TALK ABOUT what this looks like in the church today. How can we tear down walls that divide us between rich and poor? Black and white? Men and women?

Note (Women in Ministry): B.T. was ahead of his time in believing that women had the right to preach and be pastors. The friends who helped him start the new denomination were not as convinced of this, so it wasn't until 1974 that the Free Methodist Church granted women the right to be ordained as pastors.

Ephesians 2:11-16

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)— remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.



FREE TO BE EQUAL

Meet Eliza Suggs (5 minutes)

Explore the story of Eliza Suggs¹ and talk about how people with disabilities can still be an important and active part of a church, in spite of their differences. You can also read about Eliza Suggs in her book *Shadow and Sunshine* (1906) or read about her in Howard A. Snyder's book *Populist Saints*.

Elizabeth Gertrude Suggs (December 11, 1876 – January 29, 1908) was a 19th-century American author, born to former slaves. Physically impaired with Osteogenesis imperfecta, she was able to gain an education and became known as a temperance lecturer. The little that is known about Eliza Suggs can be found in her book, *Shadow and Sunshine*, published in 1906.

Eliza Suggs was born in Illinois, the youngest of four daughters of James and Malinda Suggs. Both of her parents had been born in slavery. They met while on a Mississippi plantation where Malinda had four children. James Suggs fought in the American Civil War, serving with the United States Colored Troops. He worked as a blacksmith, farmer, and laborer, but after 1873 he was a preacher in the Free Methodist Church. The family lived in Mississippi, Illinois, and Kansas before finally settling in Nebraska.

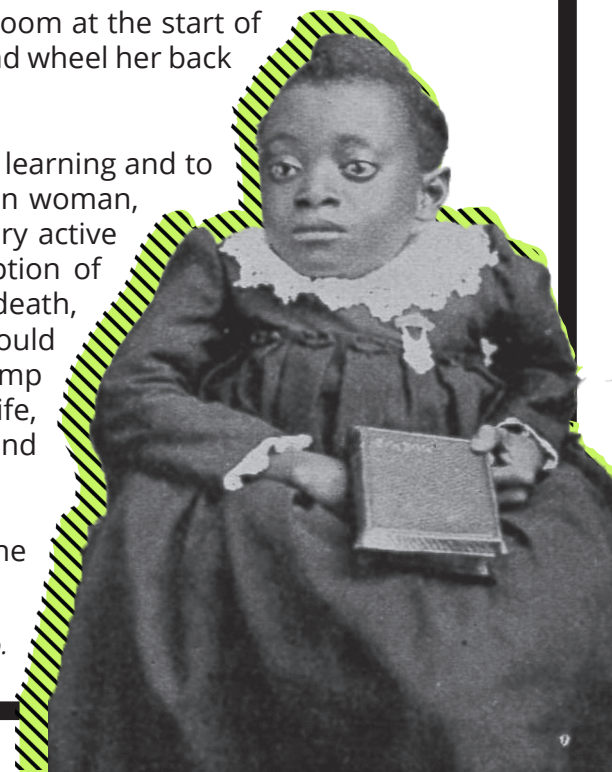
Eliza was the fourth daughter of James and Malinda. At birth she appeared to be a totally a healthy baby, but soon her parents began to realize that something wasn't quite right. At four weeks old, Eliza began crying incessantly. It took her mother a day to realize that her infant daughter had broken a limb. After that bone had healed, Eliza's arm broke. Her bones broke with the gentlest of moves. Eliza's family did not expect her to live very long. For her first six years of life, Eliza could barely move, much less even sit up on her own. Other children her age played and had fun with their friends and siblings, but Eliza could only watch from the window as she sat in her carriage. When Eliza was six her parents had burial clothes made for her. Much to their surprise, their daughter hung on into early adulthood. In the beginning, doctors could not find out what was wrong with her. As she grew older, however, and medical techniques advanced, she was diagnosed with what was then called Rickets, what is now called Osteogenesis imperfecta.

With the help of family and friends, Eliza was able to attend school. Her mother or sisters would wheel her to school and carry her up the stairs to the classroom at the start of the day. Then return to bring her back down at the end of the day and wheel her back home.

This allowed Suggs to learn everything her sisters and friends were learning and to become educated, which was very unusual for an African American woman, even after the Civil War had ended. As a young adult, Eliza was very active in the temperance movement, a movement against the consumption of alcohol. While her father was alive she assisted him, but after his death, she struck out on her own. Accompanied by her sister Kate, Eliza would attend various gatherings, including Temperance conferences, camp meetings, and church services. She would briefly speak about her life, her sufferings, and her devotion to the teachings of Jesus Christ and how they sustained her.

Eliza Suggs died on January 29, 1908 at 32 years old. She is buried in Orleans, Nebraska.

¹Eliza Suggs." Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. 3 January 2019. Web. 22 May 2019, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eliza_Suggs



FREE TO BE EQUAL

- **EQUAL** (5-10 minutes)

Cut out poster board to spell out EQUAL. Have kids come up and write in each letter a verse in the Bible that teaches us how to treat others.

- **Just Jesus** (5 minutes)

This is a great closing activity.

Give every child 2 glow sticks. Turn off the lights and have children crack their sticks and put them together as a cross. Remind them that with the lights off all you will see is the cross - no skin color, clothes, gender. Just Jesus. That's how God sees us - bearing His image.

Additional Resources

- **"Who are Free Methodists?"** 2009 Pamphlet from FMC USA
- **"Shadow and Sunshine"** Eliza Sugg's Autobiography is available as a free download from the University of North Carolina. A Google search with the terms "Shadow and Sunshine + University of North Carolina" will lead you to this free digital version.
- **Populist Saints: B.T. and Ellen Roberts and the First Free Methodists** (2006) Howard A. Snyder (Available for download on the Marston Memorial Historical Center website. A link to the Marston Historical Memorial Center website can be found at fmcusa.org listed under offices.)
- **"FM World Missions Childrens Resources"** (fmcusa.org/fmmission)
 - Visit for lots of ideas and resources to explore the global FM Church
 - Fun Fact Pages (Countries around the world)
 - Short Video Clips
- **FM Prayer Resources**
 - Praying for the World Resource (See Additional Resources folder)
 - Monthly Heartbeat mailing (including monthly prayer guide)
 - Yearly Ministry Prayer Directory
- **FM Set Free Movement:** setfreemovement.com
- **FM World Outreach Powerpoint** by Gerald Coates (See Additional Resources folder)
- **Worldwide Free Methodist Church** by Gerald Coates (See Additional Resources folder).

Event Ideas

Engage your entire church family or community through one or more of these ideas.

- **Connect** with a sister FM church internationally and develop a pen pal program or some other way to stay connected.
- **Engage** older students in an underground railroad experience, such as Follow the North Star (Connor Prairie, Fishers, IN) or visit a history museum featuring matters of inequality and injustice, such as the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center (Cincinnati, OH).
- **Choose** a Set Free Movement Projects and have your students come up with ideas of how to raise support for the cause.
- **Host** a community event (such as a community fair, etc) and be intentional about inviting people of many different cultures, socio-economic statuses, etc.

THE STORY OF B.T. ROBERTS

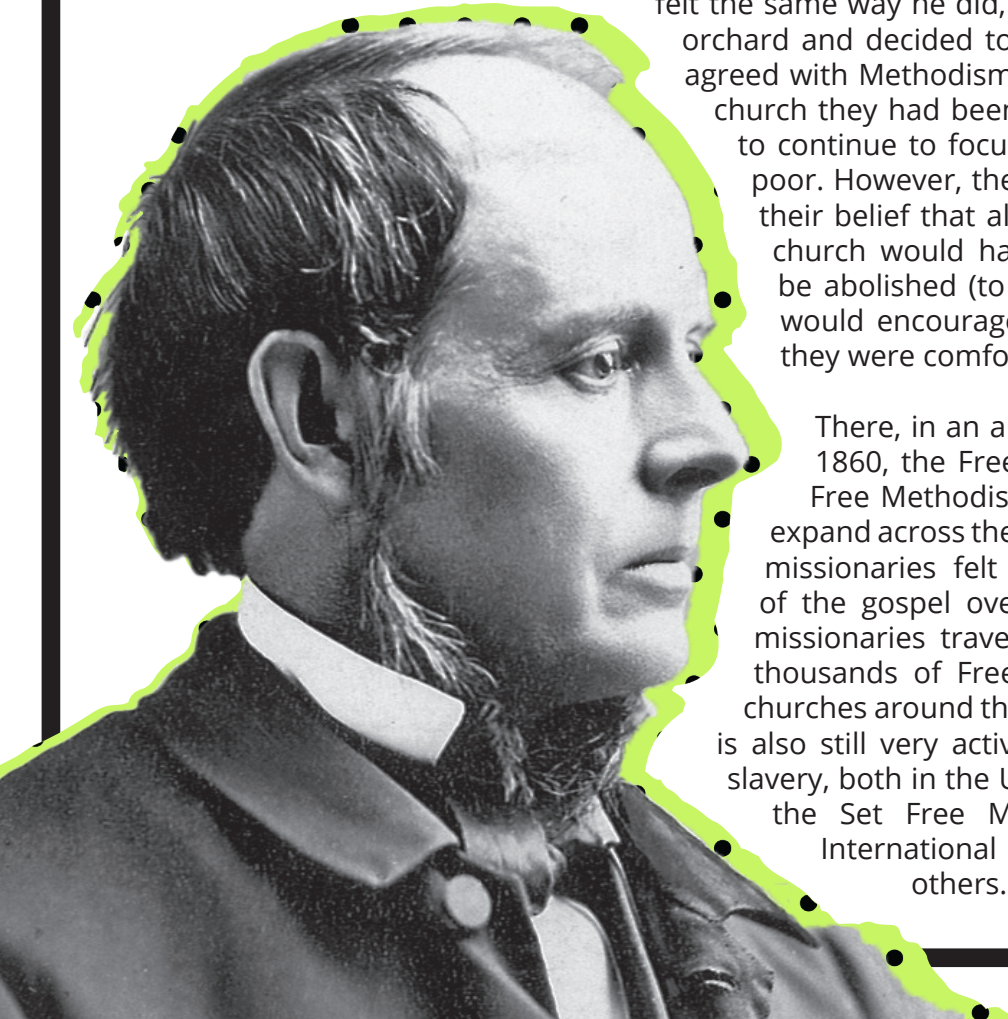
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Take it Home



FREE TO BE EQUAL

Discussion Questions from today's lesson

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