



# RELIGION & RACE

General Commission on Religion and Race

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Session 1: Child of God

*And there is no thing or no one who  
They can't separate you from the truth  
That you're someone, you are family  
You are meant to be a child of God*

By Mark A. Miller

### Watch the Video Clip (5 – 7 minutes)

Listen to Mark's words of introduction and listen to the song. Listen to the song a second time. Feel free to sing along, joining in with the chorus. If you have purchased the songbook *Roll Down, Justice!*, a reproducible congregational box of the song is found on page 81.

### Mark Miller's Reflection

These lyrics are a reflection of my reading of Romans 8:38-39: "What can separate us from God's love?" Paul makes the supreme list finally, culminating in: "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers nor things present, nor things to come...will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus."

We may try to create groups of people that are "in" and groups that are "out," groups that don't measure up to our standard. We humans are good at deciding who is included, who is worthy of our particular badge of membership. But no matter what people say, no matter what the world says, no matter what the Church says, "you are a child of God!"

### Moment of Meditation (2 – 3 minutes)

Using a notebook or a sheet of paper, respond individually and silently – to the video, the song and Mark's introduction. Jot down responses to one or more of these questions:

- What comes to mind?
- Where do you feel agreement and/or disagreement with the words you heard?
- In the area where you live, who are some 'in' groups? Who are some 'out' groups?

### Discuss the Scripture - Romans 8:38-39 (10 minutes)

Have the scripture read aloud in two or three translations. Invite members to share with the group any experience they have with the texts. For example, this may be someone's mom's favorite scripture or another member may have memorized it as part of a scripture-reciting team.

### Connect with the Justice Challenges (20 minutes)

If possible, divide the class into three groups. Assign each group one of the following topics: family, community, and church. Using notes made earlier, share about making the scripture real in one of these contexts. For example, the assigned the topic "church" may talk

about how congregations have trouble including people of various races, gender, and abilities.

Someone may identify a church that has been unable or unwilling to remove pews in the sanctuary to improve access for people with physical challenges. The community group may discuss unfair practices in employment or legal justice.

Invite groups or a volunteer to give a summary of their discussion.

### **Confession (2 – 3 minutes)**

Encourage the group to observe a moment of silence as they remember the words of the Scripture, the song, and Mark's introduction [consider playing the video a third time]. Tell them that during the time of confession they are free to speak aloud a sentence of confession of how they (their family, church, or community) have "fallen short of the glory of God."

Lead the group in this prayer:

Lord Jesus, you have shown us the way to be your people. Yet we draw boundaries that we dare not cross or that others cannot cross. Forgive us. In this moment, we confess that we have not been all that you want us to be. Forgive us. Please hear our confessions at this time (silently or aloud): \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Prayer of Intercession (2 - 3 minutes)**

Lead the group in this prayer (or one from the heart):

God, we have brought our shortcomings and our needs to you. We ask that you strengthen our hearts and hands for the work of justice in the world. Help us to recognize that each and every one of us – known and unknown – are part of your family. We are all children of God.

### **Closing (2 – 3 minutes)**

Play the video one more time and sing along. Offer a prayer of benediction and an invitation to see God in every face that we meet in the coming week.

### **Extending the Study**

Commit to praying for a "child of God" who seems to be beyond the walls of the church. It could be someone known or unknown. This is a great opportunity to call the names of mission institutions and homeless shelters and the people who need the services. Remember to pray for those who lead those institutions and those who serve.

Meet with other groups in the church (mission, evangelism greeters, youth ministries) and see how your church can be more welcoming.

If you are the pastor or preacher, give a sermon in an upcoming worship service or offer a moment of witness on extending the boundaries of love in the church, community, and families. What will you give? Perhaps your gift is forgiveness to those who have forgotten that they are children of God.

Share the music with the choir director, pianist or organist. Identify places in the services where the song might be incorporated.