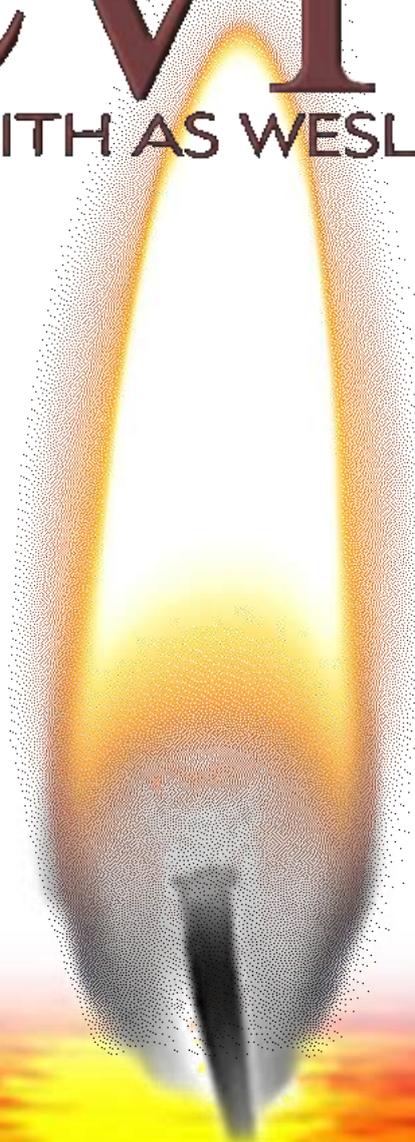


Revival

FAITH AS WESLEY LIVED IT

A lit matchstick is the central focus, with a bright yellow and orange flame. The matchstick is positioned vertically, and the flame is at the top. The background is a gradient of colors, transitioning from a bright yellow at the bottom to a deep red at the top, suggesting a sunset or sunrise over water. The matchstick is surrounded by a soft, glowing aura.

DAILY DEVOTIONS

Please note the content of this journal has been adapted from the Church of the Resurrections material on their 'Revival' preaching series and has been adapted for use at West View Methodist Church.

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Week 1

PRECURSORS TO REVIVAL

Revelation 2:1a, 2a, 4

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write ... “I know your works, your toil & your patient endurance ... But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, & do the works you did at first.”

MONDAY

2 Kings 10:15, Romans 14:1-4 Wesley's "Catholic Spirit"

John Wesley's "Catholic Spirit" sermon asked: "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? ... Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences." (He used the root meaning of "catholic" – "including many different types of thing; universal." He did not mean the Roman Church, which in his day was a denomination that did not love Christians who thought differently.) Wesley taught us much about a "Catholic Spirit," but he did not originate this way of thinking & living. The idea is Scriptural, from ancient Israel to the apostle Paul.

- Jehu, newly anointed King of Israel, needed to defeat Ahab's family, who urged Israel to worship false gods. Meeting Jehonadab, Jehu asked: "Are you as committed to me as I am to you?" (i.e., "Do we share the same ultimate goal?"—2 Kings 2:15). (Jeremiah 35 said Jehonadab founded a family faithful to God, though some of their religious practices were not common in Israel.) How can it strengthen God's work, & our own walk with God, when we & others focus on essentials we agree on more than on small differences that divide us?
- God made each person unique & wonderful (cf. Psalm 139:14). Paul reminded the Roman Christians that since each person is unique, each person's spiritual journey is, too. Encouragement & accountability are vital for spiritual growth, but comparing others to ourselves & judging them is dangerous & destructive. How can you best help others on their personal journey of "knowing, loving, & serving God & others," without comparing or judging it by yours? Who has helped you in that way?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your family is large & diverse. Give me your spirit of non-judgmental love (John 3:17), so that differences that do not bother you will not bother me either. Amen.

TUESDAY

Ephesians 4:1-6 "Accept Each Other with Love"

While Ephesians called on all Christ-followers to "accept each other with love," Edwin Prince Booth wrote that John Wesley's father, Samuel, & his

family “were exiled from their parishes or put in prison because of their obstinacy, their logic & their vigor.” His family’s history no doubt made John aware of the ways human inequity & harassment based on religious differences can damage Christ’s cause. The “Catholic Spirit” Wesley preached is one Christians must intentionally nurture.

- In his “Catholic Spirit” sermon, Wesley said, “I do not mean, ‘Embrace my modes of worship,’ or, ‘I will embrace yours.’ ... We must both act as each is fully persuaded in his own mind I believe the Episcopal form of church government to be scriptural & apostolical. If you think the Presbyterian or Independent is better, think so still, & act accordingly. I believe infants ought to be baptized; & that this may be done either by dipping or sprinkling. If you are otherwise persuaded, be so still, & follow your own persuasion.” How did his approach make the humility, gentleness, patience, love & unity Ephesians called for a practical reality in his day? How would it strengthen God’s Kingdom today if more of us adopted that same attitude to areas of difference?

Prayer: Lord, free me from the emotional blocks which blind me to people, & that make me argumentative, judgmental & unloving. I want this “Catholic Spirit” that you, Paul & John Wesley had. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

Ephesians 6:1-4 Wesley’s family: flawed, but loving

British politician & historian Augustine Birrell wrote that Wesley’s mother was “cast in a mould not much to our minds nowadays. She had nineteen children & greatly prided herself on having taught them, one after another, by frequent chastisements to—what do you think? to cry softly.” But in keeping with the wisdom of Ephesians, there was also love: “Though a stern, forbidding, almost an unfeeling, parent, she was successful in winning & retaining not only the respect but the affection of such of her huge family as lived to grow up.”

- Today we call it the “nature/nurture” question. When children lead fruitful, effective lives (as John Wesley did), how much of that is inborn & would emerge regardless of how they are raised, & how much is taught &

modelled by parents or other key people? What good things can you see in your own life that you believe came from your home of origin?

- Are there ways you've had to overcome factors from your background?
- In practical, everyday terms, what does it look like when parents "don't provoke your children to anger, but raise them with discipline & instruction about the Lord"?
- How well did your parents find a way to live out those two injunctions? If you're a parent, how would your kids say you're doing on those two points?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, for the positives from nature & nurture in my life, I'm thankful. For any negatives, I pray for your continued work in my life to keep healing me, turning my vulnerabilities into blessings for your kingdom. Amen.

THURSDAY

Psalm 68:3-6 God's care for those with flawed families

At one point, John Wesley's parents refused to live together for 12 months, because they disagreed on who ought to be king of England. Augustine Birrell noted wryly, "If John Wesley was occasionally a little pig-headed, need one wonder?" Like many of us, Wesley bore scars from his flawed family. He loved his parents, but he put his ultimate trust in God, who said through the psalmist that he is the uniquely reliable parent for even the orphaned or lonely.

- As we note every time we baptize a child, God's design is to have earthly parents model God's love & holiness for their child. In the ancient world, & still today, that design doesn't always work out. When, in either a brief crisis of loneliness or over a longer time (even a lifetime), have you turned to God for nurture & comfort? In what ways did God provide you the "family" you needed?
- Part of our faith heritage from John Wesley is the faith that we are God's voice, God's hands & feet, in a hurting world. In what ways can you join in God's work of blessing orphans, widows, the lonely & prisoners? Do you know anyone who may not be an "orphan" or "widow" in the concrete sense of the term, but who you could bless by extending God's love & care?

Prayer: O God, the psalmist said you are “Father of orphans & defender of widows.” Thank you for always being with me. Give me eyes to see others who are hurting, & use me to bless them with your love & caring. Amen.

FRIDAY

Zechariah 3:1-4 Wesley: “Snatched from the fire”

In 1709, a fire in the Wesley’s home trapped John, age 5 ½, on the second floor. A brave neighbor rescued him by standing on another man’s shoulders just before the roof fell in. From that day forward, both John & his mother said that he had been “snatched from the fire.” They believed firmly that God had a special purpose for his life.

- Zechariah’s vision originally served to encourage an Israelite high priest named Joshua after Israel had returned from exile. Hostile neighbors & the hardships of rebuilding a city & a way of life the Babylonian army had completely wiped out taxed Joshua’s courage. In your life, what “fires” (outward or inward) has God snatched you out of? How have God’s grace & mercy shaped your sense of your life’s purpose?

- At age 51, Wesley fell seriously ill. Thinking he might be about to die (he would actually live another 37 years), he composed his own epitaph, which began, “Here lieth the Body of JOHN WESLEY, A BRAND PLUCKED OUT OF THE BURNING.” What experiences have made you the most grateful for the gift of life, of each day? Ask Jesus what he has for you to be, & to do, with him.

Prayer: O God, I thank you for the gift of this Friday. Help me to live this day as a gift from your hand, to let your light shine through me & to thank you for the privilege of being alive. Amen.

SATURDAY

Romans 8:18-28 “God works all things together for good”

We’ve learned that John Wesley’s early years were tough. His family was poor, & had a mix of strengths & weaknesses. Religious & political divisions sowed hatred in England, & with a huge gap between rich & poor, many

HOME GROUP MATERIAL

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you for being with us in good times & bad & for bringing good out of even the bad times we face. Help us to see our lives, even though we struggle, as your gifts to us. Thank you for always being with us; for loving us & for holding our hands as our Father. Free us from our foolish judgments about others & instill in us a loving, “catholic spirit” so that our personal differences seem as incidental to us as they are to you. Amen.

CONNECT (5-10 minute discussion, at most)

When most people meet someone new, is our human tendency to look for their flaws & how they are different from us, or do most of us tend to accept people at face value, just as they are? What causes us to tend to react one way or the other?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & STUDY

Read 2 Kings 10:15, Romans 14:1-4.

What message do you receive from these two readings?

What does “catholic” (or universal) church mean to you?

In what way(s) are all Christians united in their thinking & beliefs?

Is there one or more Christian creed(s) that list these common beliefs?

As Christians, how are we stronger because we hold common beliefs?

What happens when we allow small differences in beliefs to come betw. us?

Would God want us to fight among ourselves? Of course, not all of us are alike. How can our differences make us stronger & more effective in doing God’s work?

How can judgmentalism over our differences harm God’s plan?

What should our attitude be toward those whose faith seems weaker or stronger than our own?

FINAL APPLICATION

This week, read through the following article entitled “Who was John Wesley?” Then spend some time carefully & prayerfully considering the life & teaching of John Wesley, & the effect he has had on your beliefs & your life. Next week, share with the group whatever you learned about him & yourself.

WHO WAS JOHN WESLEY?

John Wesley was born in 1703 in Epworth, England, the 15th child of Samuel Wesley & his wife Susanna Wesley. His father was a graduate of the University of Oxford & a Church of England rector. In 1689 Samuel had married Susanna, the 25th child of Samuel Annesley, a Dissenting minister. Wesley's parents had both become members of the established Church of England early in adulthood. Susanna bore Samuel Wesley 19 children, but only nine lived. In 1696 Wesley's father was appointed the rector of Epworth.

At the age of five, Wesley was rescued from the burning rectory. This escape made a deep impression on his mind & he regarded himself as providentially set apart, as a "brand plucked from the burning" quoting Zechariah 3:2. As in many families at the time, Wesley's parents gave their children their early education. Each child, including the girls, was taught to read as soon as they could walk & talk. In 1714, at age 11, Wesley was sent to the Charterhouse School in London (under the mastership of John King from 1715), where he lived the studious, methodical &—for a while—religious life in which he had been trained at home.

In June 1720, Wesley entered Christ Church, Oxford. He was ordained deacon in 1725 & elected fellow of Lincoln College in the following year. He received his Master of Arts in 1727. He was his father's curate for two years, & then returned to Oxford to fulfil his functions as fellow.

The year of his return to Oxford (1729) marks the beginning of the rise of Methodism. The Holy Club was formed by John's younger brother, Charles Wesley, & some fellow students, including George Whitefield. The holy club met weekly & they systematically set about living a holy life. They were branded as "Methodist" by students at Oxford who derided the methodical way they ordered their lives.

Wesley... took to open-air preaching in a similar manner to George Whitefield. In contrast to Whitefield's Calvinism, Wesley embraced the Arminian doctrines that were dominant in the 18th-century Church of England. Methodism in both forms became a highly successful evangelical movement in Britain & later in the United States. His work also helped lead to the later development of the Holiness movement & Pentecostalism.

Wesley helped to organize & form societies of Christians throughout Great Britain, North America & Ireland as small groups that developed intensive, personal accountability, discipleship & religious instruction among members. His great contribution was to appoint itinerant, unordained preachers who travelled widely to evangelize & care for people in the societies. Under Wesley's direction, Methodists became leaders in many social issues of the day, including prison reform & abolitionism.

Although he was not a systematic theologian, Wesley argued in favour of 'Christian perfection' & opposed Calvinism, notably the doctrine of predestination. He held that, in this life, Christians could come to a state in which the love of God "reigned supreme in their hearts", allowing them to attain a state of outward holiness. His evangelical theology was firmly grounded in sacramental theology & he continually insisted on means of grace as the manner by which God sanctifies & transforms the believer, encouraging people to experience Jesus Christ personally.

Throughout his life Wesley remained within the Established Church & insisted that his movement was well within the bounds of the Anglican tradition. His maverick use of church policy put him at odds with many within the Church of England, though toward the end of his life he was widely respected & referred to as "the best loved man in England." Read much more at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wesley

PERSONAL NOTES

Week 2

A LONGING FOR HOLINESS

I Peter 1:13-16

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Hebrews 10:22-25, 12:10-15 Helping each other toward holiness

Methodist editor J. Richard Peck wrote, “John Wesley graduated from Oxford University & became a priest in the Church of England in 1728. Beginning in 1729, he participated in the Holy Club, a religious study group organized by his brother Charles (1707-1788) ... Bound by covenant, they worshipped, prayed & studied—and visited prisoners & cared for the poor, orphans & the sick, emphasizing both personal & social holiness.”

- Hebrews 10 said one of the principal purposes for meeting together as believers was “sparking love & good deeds.” In what ways did meeting together play an important role in nurturing the Wesley brothers’ spiritual life & commitment in the Oxford University environment? In what ways do your connections with other believers “spark” you to live out your faith? How are you able to encourage others?

- Hebrews 12, in just a few verses, linked holiness with healing, peace, discipline & God’s grace. What people or events most shaped your view of what it means to be “holy”? Do you tend to see holiness as positive & appealing, or does the word trigger less positive images for you? Does it make you more eager to “pursue holiness” when you realize that holiness describes what God, & life in God’s kingdom, are like?

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for connecting me to your family. Help me to “spark” love & good deeds in others, & to be receptive to your sparks as they arrive in my life. Amen.

Tuesday

Psalm 147:7-12, Matthew 4:8-11 Methodical worship

John Wesley sought to live a “holy & devout life” & adopted many “methods” to help him live that way. Regular worship was one of those crucial methods for Wesley. It is still an essential “method” for Christians. Yet we don’t worship our “methods,” abilities or anything else about ourselves. The ultimate, appropriate object of our worship is always God.

- Psalm 147 encouraged readers to worship & praise God. It said God rejoices in those who love, honor & worship him with their lives. God doesn’t require great feats of strength, hard work or even faith. To worship is to

honour God, & put our hope in God's faithful love (verse 11). Do you find it hard to believe or trust that your worship can bring God joy? How does knowing that God rejoices in your worship affect your relationship with God?

- Popularity, prosperity, prestige—something in each of us is tempted to base choices on the drive to acquire the “kingdoms of the world & all their glory.” Jesus, too, faced this temptation while on earth (cf. Hebrews 4:15). But Jesus focused his life on worshipping & serving God. Which “kingdoms of the world & their glory” most tempt you to leave God's path? How can you, like Jesus, resist that temptation? (One of Jesus' strategies was Scripture memorization. Try memorizing Matthew 4:10.)

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you knew what I sometimes forget: ultimately, worship is not about dressing up or going somewhere. Worshipping God means making God & God's kingdom my highest priority. Help me to do that every day. Amen.

Wednesday

Psalms 42:5-8, 1 Thessalonians 3:5-10 Praying night & day

Both the Old & New Testaments spoke of regular prayer, both day & night, as a habit characteristic of God's people (cf. also Daniel 6:10, Luke 2:37, 6:12). Through the centuries, various Christian groups developed ways of “praying the hours.” The Wesley brothers & their Oxford friends, too, chose to pray at specified times every day.

- For many thinking people, prayer touches on cosmic mysteries & raises many questions. (Excellent books like Phillip Yancey's *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* grapple with these questions.) In simple words, what do you believe is the main reason to pray? Who benefits most from prayer—God, you, or the relationship between you?

- People frequently say, “It's hard to pray regularly—I end up saying the same tired words over & over.” It doesn't have to be that way. You may want to check out a book like *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions & Times* by Teresa A. Blythe or *Praying with the Psalms* by Eugene Peterson. Choose at least one time of day when you will commit to pray every day in the coming week.

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for listening when I pray. Help me learn to listen for you, too, when I pray—and to speak with you as regularly as I do other things that are important to me. Amen.

Thursday

Acts 17:1-12, Romans 15:2-7 Lives guided by the Bible's principles

From its very start (cf. Luke 24:25-27, Acts 2:22-36), the Christian faith believed deeply that the Bible (at first, only in the Hebrew Scriptures we call the Old Testament), carefully & rightly read, bear witness to Jesus. Paul believed that; so did the people he preached to in Berea. John & Charles Wesley also saw careful Bible study as a key “method” for spiritual growth. (They were Oxford students, so they often studied the New Testament in Greek!)

- In his *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament*, John Wesley urged readers to “To set apart a little time, if you can, every morning & evening for [reading the Scripture] ... It might also be of use, if while we read, we were frequently to pause, & examine ourselves by what we read, both with regard to our hearts, & lives.”
- Do difficult passages make you avoid Bible reading? If you read four things you don't understand & one that speaks clearly to you, focus on the one thing you understand & set the rest aside for later. Try it. Read Matthew 5, the first part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, asking God to speak to you through all the parts that are clear to you.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you worked with many human hands & voices to bring me the Bible. You speak to my heart & millions more through this amazing book. Renew my hunger to read & understand your one-of-a-kind story. Amen.

Friday

James 1:22-27 Holiness that cares for orphans & widows

One key reality that John Wesley grasped early from his worship & Bible study was that true holiness wasn't just personal, but social. He & his friends got actively involved in helping prisoners & widows in Oxford. Holding

together personal & social holiness has remained important to Wesley's spiritual descendants ever since.

- In John Wesley's day (as today), there were many who claimed to be followers of Christ, even though their intellectual knowledge of Christ's teachings made no difference to the way they lived their lives. In what ways has your allegiance to Christ altered your activities, priorities & lifestyle?
- James (who was in all likelihood Jesus' brother) used a phrase that may startle us at first, writing of "the perfect law, the law of freedom." In what ways have you found that living in accordance with God's call increases your freedom rather than limiting or frustrating it? When have you found in your own experience that doing whatever you feel like produces, not freedom, but a destructive kind of slavery?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want the true freedom you offer me. Help me use my freedom to serve & bless others, as you did. Amen.

Saturday

1 Peter 1:13-16 "The one who called you is holy"

An inner hunger for holiness was the guiding flame that illuminated all of John Wesley's life & teaching. As he found, holiness is a broad Bible word, taking in all of God's vast love & goodness (cf. Isaiah 6:3), & all the good things God desires us to be. Peter invited his Christian readers to "let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life, a life energetic & blazing with holiness." (verse 15, *The Message*).

- Scholar William Barclay wrote about Peter's words, "The word for 'holy' is *hagios* whose root meaning is 'different.' The Temple is *hagios* because it is different from other buildings; the Sabbath is *hagios* because it is different from other days; the Christian is *hagios* because he is different from other men. The Christian is... chosen for a task in the world & for a destiny in eternity. He is chosen to live for God in time & with God in eternity. In the world he must obey God's law & reproduce his life. There is laid on the Christian the task of being different." How does your heart respond to Peter's stirring call to be holy, to be different by living as God's blazing light in a darkened world? Are you willing to step up & say, "Yes—count me in"?

HOME GROUP MATERIAL

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Almighty God, you called your ancient people, & you call us, to be different. We pray that we might become ever more different, ever more holy, as your people. We wish to obey & become truly free. Draw us to the Bible. Increase our hunger to understand & act on your guidance. Lead us in our prayers & teach us to listen even as we speak to you. Increase our desire to worship you, & let our fellowship with one another spark our love for others. Amen.

CONNECT (5-10 minute discussion, at most)

Would you say that South Africans spend a lot of time entertaining themselves with TV, computers, iPods, video games, etc., or a little? Are these practices so excessive as to be good or bad for us as individuals & for South Africa as a culture? Are there some worthwhile practices that you see diminishing in modern society?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & STUDY

Read Hebrews 10:22-25, 12:10-15.

In what ways is it beneficial for Christians to meet together?

Can these meetings spark increased holiness?

In our meetings, how do we tend to encourage one another?

What image does the concept of “holiness” conjure for you?

What image does the world tend to have of the idea of holiness?

What might prevent you from wanting to become more “holy”?

FROM LAST WEEK

Did you read more about John Wesley & the Methodist movement from article & the extensive history available online? Did you carefully & prayerfully consider the life & teaching of Wesley, & the effect he has had on your beliefs & your life? Share with the group whatever you learned about him & yourself.

FINAL APPLICATION

This week, prayerfully consider the list of spiritual disciplines listed above. Ask yourself which of those disciplines need your greater attention. Each day, try to incorporate these disciplines into your daily life. Next week, share with the group how you did.

JOHN WESLEY & THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

John Wesley used to start his covenant group meetings with the question, "How is it with your soul?" Spiritual formation is not something we do, it's who we are. It is the care & nurture of our soul. The spiritual disciplines are ancient practices through which Christians have nurtured their souls for many years. Take some time to explore these channels of God's grace.

Prayer: "To live the life of prayer means to emerge from my drowse, to awaken to the communing, guiding, healing, clarifying, & transforming current of God's Holy Spirit in which I am immersed" (Douglas V. Steere). Prayer is a conversation with God. There are many ways to pray. Prayer is the language through which we speak to God & participate in his Kingdom work.

Worship: "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God" (William Temple). Jesus tells us in John 4 that we are to worship "in spirit & truth." Worship is not about a place, but an attitude. Worship happens wherever we meet God & sense his presence.

Fasting: "More than any other Discipline, fasting reveals the things that control us" (Richard Foster). Technically, fasting is abstinence from food for some period of time. But the discipline of fasting can relate to abstaining from anything that we habitually depend upon in order to increase our dependence on God. We see this practiced most often during the season of Lent, when Christians give up something in sympathy with the suffering of Christ. But as Richard Foster points out, we should give up anything that controls us & reduces our dependency on God.

Scripture: "We will only be happy in our reading of the Bible when we dare to approach it as the means by which God really speaks to us, the God who loves us & will not leave us with our questions unanswered" (Dietrich Bonhoeffer). There are two ways to read scripture: informationally & formationally. We study the Bible to understand its universal message & truth. We read the Bible formationally when we are receptive to the personal truth that God reveals to us individually.

Study: Read Romans 12:2. The spiritual disciplines help us trade our worldly habits for holy habits. We all read & listen to the radio or television. But how much of that steady diet of words is God's Word? Through the discipline of study we immerse ourselves in the thoughts of other Christians & examine our own beliefs & attitudes in light of God's truth. In addition to reading scripture, we should study the spiritual classics of the past & of today.

Stewardship: "So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?" (Luke 16:11). Stewardship is our act of worship & gratitude to God for all that he has given to us. We primarily think of our finances when we hear the word "stewardship," but this discipline applies to anything & everything that God has given us to take care of. When we think of everything we have as belonging to God (Deut. 10:14), then we make different decisions with our resources.

Solitude: The greatest threat to spiritual growth is not creating enough white space in our calendars & our heads to spend listening to God. Hurry is the enemy of transformation. In unhurried silence we can see & hear things that are normally drowned out in the rush of our days. If we retreat into the desert of our minds, we allow God to reveal himself to us. He will also reveal those thoughts, feelings, & emotions that are preventing us from growing closer to him.

Fellowship: "Christianity means community in & through Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this, whether it be a brief, single encounter or the daily fellowship of years. While it is important to have time in solitude, it is equally essential to spend time in Christian community & fellowship. We are meant to live out our faith with others, not alone. Fellowship can happen in groups, or one-on-one. This is how we can connect with the Body of Christ.

Service: "If I then, your Lord & Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should also do as I have done for you" (John 13:14-15). When we serve others we practice the discipline of humility. We are called to humble ourselves to care for others. It's not what we do that matters, but the attitude with which we do it. Through service we show God's love to those who desperately need to know that they are loved.

Week 3

A CRISIS OF FAITH

Romans 4:3-5, 5:1-2b

For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, & it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness ... Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.

Monday

Galatians 2:16-21 “I... was never myself converted to God

John Wesley tried hard to be holy—and outwardly did quite well. Yet sailing back to England after two hard years in the colony of Georgia, he wrote in his journal, “I went to America, to convert the Indians; but oh! who shall convert me?... I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well ... But in a storm I think, 'What if the gospel be not true? ... I left my native country to teach the Georgian Indians ... But what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why (what I the least of all suspected), that I who went to America to convert others was never myself converted to God.” He’d found, as the apostle Paul did, that “trying harder” to earn God’s love doesn’t work.

- When Paul wrote “we KNOW that a person isn’t made righteous by the works of the Law,” he wasn’t speaking hypothetically. He’d once lived in confidence that his own religious credentials were good enough to impress God (cf. Philippians 3:3-7), only to realize he could never be that holy. What’s your experience? What has awakened in your heart a sense of your need for God’s redeeming love & grace?
- In Galatians, Paul answered people who said Gentile Christians must follow the Hebrew ritual of circumcision (cf. Galatians 5:2-6). The principle was the same for Wesley, though the outward rituals of holiness were different. What are some external signs of holiness on which you might be tempted to rely today? How can you practice holiness as an outgrowth of your love relationship with God, not as an effort to earn that love?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for loving me & giving yourself for me. Thank you for daily walking with me in a closer & closer relationship, one that allows me to face the troubles this life brings with confidence because you are with me. Amen.

Tuesday

Romans 3:9-28 “I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation”

Wesley’s inner struggle opened his spirit to hear & trust the good news that God accepts us by grace, not based on our work. Here’s how he described the moment in his journal: “I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate

Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation."

- As in so many movie scenes, in this passage the protagonist's situation is hopeless, with no way out (verse 20). Then, suddenly, we see or hear a signal that rescue (salvation), which seemed impossible, is in fact on the scene ("But now"--verse 21). "All have sinned ... but all are treated as righteous freely by his grace," Paul wrote triumphantly. When did this great truth first warm your heart? Does it still?

- Paul used six Scripture quotes (Psalm 51:4, Psalm 14:1-3, Psalm 5:9, Psalm 10:7, Isaiah 59:7-8, & Psalm 36:1) to show that no one, from the most libertine Gentile to the most careful Pharisee, keeps God's law fully. (One preacher said the moral law is like a sheet of glass. If it's broken anywhere, it's broken--cf. James 2:10.) In what ways does this seemingly bad news form us into a community of people with a shared need who live by faith in God's grace? How might that shared need free a person like John Wesley from shame, so that he could openly accept his need of mercy & grace?

Prayer: Lord God, through Paul you showed me how to deal with guilt when I do something wrong. I no longer need to turn guilt ("I made a mistake") into shame ("I AM a mistake.") Thank you for freeing me--warm my heart today with your grace. Amen.

Wednesday

1 John 5:10-13 "An assurance was given me"

As John Wesley accepted that God saves us solely by grace, he was able to quit "hoping" or "wishing" to be saved. He recorded the change in these words: "An assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, & saved me from the law of sin & death. I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me & persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart."

- *The Message* captured what Wesley meant by the word “assurance” by phrasing verse 13 this way: “My purpose in writing is simply this: that you who believe in God’s Son will know beyond the shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life.” Do you have that kind of confidence that God truly accepts you? In what ways has living with assurance created space in your life for you to experience the “fruit of the Spirit:” love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness & self-control (cf. Galatians 5:22-23)?

- Christian faith certainly looks to the future with hope. But the writings associated with John regularly did something different with the idea of “eternal life”: they put it in the present tense (cf. John 3:36, 5:24, 6:47, 54, 10:28, as well as today’s reading). What different light does it cast on whatever you face today to realize that this day is already a part of the “eternal life” God gives you?

Prayer: Lord, thank you that your gift of eternal life is not a matter of “maybe” or “I hope.” Help me to live with assurance that you have taken away my sins, & given me more love, more joy, more peace. Amen.

Thursday

1 Timothy 2:2-6, Luke 24:44-49 “I know my commission” The gospel of God’s grace, planted in John Wesley’s heart, fueled him to lead an explosive revival of Christian faith in Britain, & then America. Despite having grown up in a restrained church that seldom touched ordinary people’s lives, Wesley couldn’t imagine not sharing the good news that had changed his life. Of preaching outdoors to those who wouldn’t darken the door of a church, he wrote, “Field-preaching is a cross to me. But I know my commission & see no other way of ‘preaching the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15).’”

- Wesley echoed Paul’s words to Timothy when he said he believed his commission was to preach the gospel to “every creature.” In John 3, Jesus said he could save everyone who believed in him. Do you know people with whom you wish you could share what Jesus means to you? Are you ever tempted to “write off” any of those people because “they’d never respond”? Ask God to help you see every person you know, even the “unlikely” ones, as a potential citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

- In Luke, Jesus promised his followers the Holy Spirit’s power to preach forgiveness of sins “to all nations.” That’s why, important as it is that West View shares the good news with people in the Centurion area, we Reach out further. In what ways are you able to help carry the word to all nations?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to be ready to give a reason for my hope—here in Kansas City & around the globe. Give me a heart like yours, one that urgently wants to reach out & include all people in your love. Amen.

Friday

Titus 2:11-15 “Are not their souls also precious?”

In Wesley’s class-conscious England, many people thought the Christian faith was only for the “proper” people. But Wesley knew, like Paul before him, that the good news was for all people. More than that, they both knew that God’s people were encouraged to share their Christian hope with others. Wesley once wrote in his journal about a group he’d preached to, “I am apt to think many of the hearers scarcely ever heard a Methodist before, or perhaps any other preacher... Are not their souls also precious in the sight of God?”

- Verse 11 sums up an essential Christian truth: God’s salvation is for all people. Author Jerry Bridges writes about the danger of “respectable” sins such as pride, impatience, anger & judgmentalism because they are often harder to recognize than “obvious” sins like murder, theft, adultery, etc. Open yourself to God today. In what ways do you need God’s grace? Thank God for grace & ask him to help you grow in those areas.

- In verse 15, Paul gave Titus a task: “Talk about these things.” (Verses 12 & 14 make it clear that the kind of life he & his converts lived could “talk.”) That same task is ours. Ask God to give you an “inner nudge” whenever anyone you know is ready to hear your faith story, or to accept an invitation to join you in worship this weekend—& be ready to share that story or invitation.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I'm thankful that I'm precious enough to you that you died for me & sent your Spirit to shape my life. Give me eyes to see that same preciousness in others, as you do. Amen.

Saturday

Luke 14:12-24 "I submitted... & proclaimed in the highways"

Jesus lived among many religious people who recoiled at the idea of sharing God's kingdom with "sinners" (a term they defined roughly as "not as good as I am"). To some of them, Jesus told a shocking story about a king who invited even the town's street people to a royal banquet. In that spirit, John Wesley & the early Methodists preached faith to people of all social classes. In 1739, Wesley wrote ironically in his journal about his own inner struggle with his "upright" background: "At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile & proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people."

- Recently deceased priest & writer Brennan Manning loved to quote the college student who, after reading the gospels, said, "Wow—God sure has a thing for ragamuffins." Learning about John Wesley's conversion experience & the powerful preaching that followed poses two very personal questions.

First, can you see the degree to which you are a ragamuffin before God, one more person who desperately & gratefully needs God's grace & mercy? Second, are you open to inviting & welcoming into God's kingdom the ragamuffins of all kinds who live around you, even if at first you might feel a bit uncomfortable in their company?

Prayer: Lord God, you are an actively loving, seeking God. Thank you for calling me to be one of your human partners in the work of going into the highways & back alleys, so that your heavenly banquet may be full. Amen.

HOME GROUP MATERIAL

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Lord God, we thank you for calling us to be your servants, working to invite others to fill your banquet table. We thank you for your gift of salvation & for the help of your Holy Spirit. Fill our hearts with the assurance of your love & forgiveness, & with hope & love for all humanity. Remove our guilt & free us in spirit & truth. Be with us every day. Amen.

CONNECT (5-10 minute discussion, at most)

Without discussing specific actions: How hard do you find it personally to determine what is right & wrong for you (not to assess the actions or attitudes of others)? What factors tend to cloud the issues in your own mind? Can you, for yourself only, tend to “feel” the rightness or wrongness of the daily choices you have to make, or is that often unclear & confusing?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & STUDY

Read Galatians 2:16-21.

Do you tend to see yourself as a “good, holy Christian” because of your good deeds, or because of your deep & abiding faith in Christ’s grace & forgiveness?

Should we as Christians rigidly follow “the rules” of how we should behave, or should we follow Christ’s leading through the Holy Spirit in our hearts?

Read Romans 3:9-28. Do you find it hard to accept that, no matter how hard you try to do right, you are a “sinner”?

How can your sin be erased & forgotten?

When you realize you have done wrong, do you tend to feel like a failure before God? What can you do then?

One preacher said the moral law is like a sheet of glass. If it’s broken anywhere, it’s broken. So as a community of believers, what is our shared need?

Can that shared need (for forgiveness through faith; for mercy & grace) free us from shame?

FROM LAST WEEK

Did you prayerfully consider the list of spiritual disciplines, & ask yourself which disciplines needed your greater attention? Did you, each day, try to

Week 4

PREACHING & PURSUING GRACE

Ephesians 2:8-10

For by grace you have been saved through faith, & this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Monday

John 16:1-4, Matthew 5:10-12 “Mr. Wesley, not being permitted to preach in the church ...”

When John Wesley went to Epworth, his hometown, he drily noted that the curate “did not care to accept of my assistance.” Then, he wrote, “After sermon John Taylor stood in the churchyard & gave notice as the people were coming out, ‘Mr. Wesley, not being permitted to preach in the church, designs to preach here at six o’clock’ ... at six I came & found such a congregation as I believe Epworth never saw before. I stood ... upon my father’s tombstone, & cried, ‘The kingdom of heaven is not meat & drink; but righteousness, & peace, & joy in the Holy Ghost’ [Rom. 14:17].”

- The apostle Paul wrote, “If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people” (Romans 12:18). Jesus, & John Wesley, did their best to persuade others to accept their message, yet found themselves hated & harassed. In our seemingly more tolerant age, what forms can “persecution” take? How does Jesus call us to respond if that happens? Who do you trust enough to help you honestly assess if any opposition you face is for Christ’s sake, or due to a failure to make Christ’s message as appealing as possible?
- Jesus, John Wesley & many other servants of God throughout history called for life change, for deeper devotion to God. Yet most of those who fought them claimed their hatred grew out of their devotion to God. How can your love of God help to keep you open to needed changes (personal or organizational), rather than simply reinforcing an innate preference for the status quo?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you didn’t hate even when others hated you. You also didn’t abandon your mission when facing their hate. Keep teaching me how to live with your kind of steadfast love & sense of mission. Amen.

Tuesday

2 Corinthians 5:11-15 “Christ died for all”

John Wesley concluded, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, that Christ “died for the sake of all,” not just for “the elect.” His faith that God’s all-inclusive love & grace gives us the freedom to choose our eternal fate was not a mere theological technicality, but the basis for his powerful, urgent preaching of

salvation. That belief in God's free grace & our moral freedom (called "Arminian," after a Dutch preacher, Jacobus Arminius) became a defining part of Methodism.

- Paul, expressing some of his core convictions, wrote, "So we try to persuade people." What differences do you see between trying to persuade people & trying to force them to believe as you do? In what ways can loving & caring about someone be more persuasive than arguing in an "I'm right—you're wrong" spirit?

- Through the centuries, "Calvinists" (after John Calvin, who strongly believed that God predestined some people for salvation & the rest for eternal loss) & Arminians have had heated debates. Wesley, in keeping with his "Catholic Spirit," once wrote, "However I love the persons who assert it, I abhor the doctrine of predestination." Are you able to love people who hold views different from yours, & will not (at least for now) be persuaded to change?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, even when we Christians differ about just how you save us, we agree that you do, & that we are grateful for that gift. I thank you for the ways your love & grace are at work in my life. Amen.

Wednesday

Psalm 119:1-16 "The Rules of the Society"

It was ironic that his critics called Wesley an unruly agitator. He did reach people in atypical ways that shocked some staid British clergymen, but he was in fact a very disciplined man. It's no surprise to find that, in the same spirit as the writer of Psalm 119, he wrote in his journal, "About fifty of us being met, the Rules of the Society were read over & carefully considered one by one; but we did not find any that could be spared. So we all agreed to abide by them all & to recommend them with our might."

- Bishop Reuben Job, in his book *Three Simple Rules*, paraphrased the three General Rules as "do no harm," "do all the good you can," & "stay in love with God." How can these rules (which Wesley never claimed were on the same level as God's law in the Bible) help you live into the reality the

psalmist expressed: “I will give thanks to you with a heart that does right as I learn your righteous rules” (verse 7)?

- Imagine a world where everyone lived by these rules. How much tension, fear, deceit or grief would a world like that have? What is one step you will take to align your life more closely, inwardly & outwardly, with the spirit of the three General Rules? Ask God for grace & the strength of divine love in doing this. Get pastoral or professional help if you need it. “Do no harm,” “do all the good you can,” & “stay in love with God.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for accepting me just as I am. Now guide me as, in grateful response to your love, I seek to use these rules to guide me in living more & more as you lived on earth. Amen.

Thursday

John 15:9-17 “No person ever misses his band or class”

After visiting a Methodist “band” (i.e. small group) of coal miners, John Wesley described their commitment in his journal: “No person ever misses his band or class; they have no jar of any kind among them but with one heart & one mind ‘provoke one another to love & to good works.’” This group of plain working people, Wesley said, could be “a pattern” for all Methodists. Love leads to commitment & obedience, as Jesus said in today’s passage. Jesus’ love for God the Father led him to commit, obey, & share God’s love with others, & he calls us to that same kind of commitment, obedience & love.

- Verse 9 started with ten transforming words from Jesus: “As the Father has loved me, I too have loved you.” God’s love for us calls us to share that love with each other (cf. Matthew 22:37-40). Love breeds commitment—the more we love God & others, the more committed we are to them. How does God’s love for you motivate you to greater loyalty? How does your love for others lead you to commit time & energy to them? In what practical ways do you live out your loving commitment to God & others?

- We often react negatively to the idea of obedience, whether because we hate to submit to another, or because so many “authorities” have proved unreliable. But obedience comes readily if it means pleasing someone you

love & value! Jesus described that type of obedience—not grudging, coercive or calculating, but obedience born of love for God & the desire to please & honour him (verse 10). Have you ever longed to please someone, & been happy to “obey” their wishes? Are you able to trust Jesus, submit to him, & know you are better off for putting your life in his hands?

Prayer: Lord God, I love you, & I trust you. I want my life to bring you honour & joy as I obey your guidance. Mould my attitudes & actions from the inside out to always be pleasing to you. Amen.

Friday

Psalm 149:1-5 “Sing all”

Charles Wesley was the family’s hymn writer - probably the most prolific ever, with over 6,000 hymns to his name. John cared about worship music, too, & published “Directions for Singing” for the use of his Methodist societies. Like the Psalms, they urged everyone to join in singing praises to God.

- Do you sing in worship? Do you ever sing along with your car radio, TV commercials or your iPod? Do you ever sing or hum in the shower, or while doing basic household chores? In what ways have your life experiences created in you either an eagerness to sing to God in worship, or a reluctance to sing where anyone else might hear you?

- Singing, wonderful as it is, is only one form of human expression. The psalmist also wrote, “Let them praise God’s name with dance; let them sing God’s praise with the drum & lyre!... Let the faithful celebrate with glory; let them shout for joy on their beds” (verses 3, 5). What ways of expressing the deep joy God gives you deep inside are most natural for you? How can you use them to praise & honour God?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I offer all glory, praise & honour to you today. Make of my life a song of love to you. Amen.

Saturday

Ephesians 5:15-21 “Above all sing spiritually”

Wesley’s “Directions for Singing” included some specific musical tips that may make us smile (or applaud). “Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength,” he advised. He followed with a caution: “Do not bawl, so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation ... but strive to unite your voices together.” “Sing in time,” he urged, & in particular “take care not to sing too slow.” But the most important idea came last: “Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature.”

- Jesus told the Samaritan woman he met at Jacob’s Well that the living water he would give her would be “a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life” (John 4:14). That same sense of bubbling, overflowing gratitude & life fills today’s reading. When have you most clearly sensed the joy, meaning & acceptance that God gives bubbling within you? In what ways, musical or otherwise, have you been able to express your thanks for God’s gift? Today is Saturday—ask God to fill you with the Spirit as you worship this weekend. Plan to look beyond your mundane concerns in the coming week, & live as a person gratefully making music to the Lord in your heart.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, instead of just numbing my pain, disappointment or worry, you offer me gratitude, purpose & life. Fill me with your Spirit, & send me into the coming week with your song ringing in my heart. Amen.

HOME GROUP MATERIAL

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Lord Jesus, send us into every week filled with your Spirit of love, joy, purpose & life. We praise you today & sing to your glory. We offer our lives to you & pray that our lives might please you & bring you honour. Help us to be mindful of your rules obedient in our love, & always grateful for your grace which keeps us steadfast in your mission. Amen.

CONNECT (5-10 minute discussion, at most)

We think it's wonderful that God is so gracious. In your experience of work, school, home, neighbourhood or other familiar settings, how gracious are we to one another? If there's a difference, what makes us like God's grace more than we like being gracious?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & STUDY

Read John 16:1-4, Matthew 5:10-12

In what ways, have you ever heard, felt or sensed the derision of others as a result of your faith & commitment to Christ? How did you handle it?

Despite their derision, do you think that the evidence of your faith might have had some positive effect upon them?

Could their negative response be, not to your faith, but to the way you expressed it?

How could we adjust, alter or reinvent our ways of expressing our faith to make it more appealing & acceptable to others?

Are you open to such adjustments?

FROM LAST WEEK

Did you prayerfully consider whether you have fully accepted God's acceptance of you? Did you ask yourself if God is calling you to do anything more or different as his ambassador? Did you recommit yourself to your faith & God's work & seek opportunities to take part in that work? Please share with the group anything significant you discovered.

FINAL APPLICATION

This week, reflect on John Wesley preaching in a region called Kingswood. It was a coal mining area in Wesley's day. The coal miners, called colliers, were folks who worked hard & died young. Their children were often poor & uneducated. The miners were a rough group, &, at this time, there wasn't a single church in the area of the mines where they lived. Where, in Centurion or the larger world, are there regions today that might be the equivalent of Kingswood? In what ways, direct or indirect, can you be involved in Wesley's work of sharing God's grace with the colliers? Is God calling you in any way to get more involved in sharing "beyond the walls" of the church? Next week, share with the group any ideas or learnings you have in this reflection.

WEEK 5

SANTIFICATION: PERFECTED IN LOVE

James 2:14-18

What good is it, my brothers & sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked & lacks daily food, & one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm & eat your fill,” & yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith & I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, & I by my works will show you my faith.

Ephesians 2:8-10

By grace you have been saved through faith, & this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Monday

Matthew 5:13-16 “Christianity is essentially a social religion”

John Wesley, following the teaching of Jesus, said, “Christianity is essentially a social religion.” Jesus did not retreat & live on an isolated island, & he does not call Christians to vacate their cultures for an exclusively Christian environment. God’s followers are to be “salt & light” in the world. God empowers us to “preserve” what is good & live lives that shine light into the darkness of our world.

- Lamps light up the darkness. It would be pointless to light a lamp & cover it up. Jesus compared his followers to a lamp in a dark room, or a city on a hill at night, seen for miles around. God still calls us to be his light, to help people lost in the darkness find their way to the light, & ultimately dispel the darkness. What choices do you make in your attitudes & actions to ensure that those around you see Jesus’ light more clearly as they spend time with you?
- In Jesus’ day, there was no electricity or refrigerators. People preserved food with salt. In today’s passage, Jesus said he means his followers to be “the salt of the earth,” living in such a way that they “preserve” what is good in the world. He said bluntly that if people have lost their “saltiness,” they are “good for nothing.” In what ways are you living out your faith in such a way as to preserve the good in the world? What would be the point of following Jesus if not to join in his mission to be salt & light in the world?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are not a secret to be kept. Shine your light of love through me, this day & every day, & use me to make the world you love a bit more like the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

Tuesday

Ephesians 2:4-10 “Works of mercy ... which are real means of grace”

Paul, as passionate a preacher of God’s saving grace as ever lived, wrote that when we accept that grace, we live as people “created in Christ Jesus to do good things.” To people who argued that grace made Christian actions unnecessary, Wesley said, “Surely there are works of mercy ... which are real means of grace. They are more especially such to those that perform

them with a single eye. & those that neglect them, do not receive the grace which otherwise they might.”

- The Second General Rule of the Methodist Church is John Wesley’s way of applying the idea that we are “created in Christ Jesus to do good things”: “By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, &, as far as possible, to all men.” In what ways does the phrase “doing good of every possible sort” spark your imagination? What are one or two “sorts” of goodness you didn’t use to practice, but now do as a follower of Christ?
- What is your life’s purpose? (Saying “I don’t know” doesn’t mean you don’t have one. Even if you’ve never given it conscious thought, you make choices each day based on some inner vision of who you are & what you’re here for.) Spend some quiet time today reflecting on your life’s purpose in the light of what Ephesians 2:10 says about God’s intention for your life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for offering me the gift of your saving, transforming grace. Guide me this day as I seek to live into the reality of the good things you’ve created me to do. Amen.

Wednesday

1 John 3:14-18 “We were enabled to feed ... a hundred & fifty a day”

The apostle John said no one filled with God’s love could see a brother or sister in need & not try to help. John Wesley wrote of a time when he lived this out: “At Hannam, four miles from Bristol ... I made a collection in our congregation for the relief of the poor, [outside] Lawford’s gate; who, having no work ... & no assistance from the parish wherein they lived, were reduced to the last extremity. I made another collection on Thursday & a third on Sunday, by which we were enabled to feed a hundred, sometimes a hundred & fifty, a day, of those whom we found to need it most.”

- John used strong words about those who saw their brothers & sisters in need, & didn’t care. He said such people hated their brothers & sisters, which made them murderers (verse 15)! Can apathy & inaction have results as murderous as active malice? What ways have you found to help yourself

avoid “compassion fatigue,” & remain sensitive when God nudges you to help someone in need?

- U2 lead singer Bono uses the term “stupid poverty” to refer to problems (like the lack of clean drinking water in many parts of Africa) which we could eliminate with a fraction of the money spent on sports games or TV awards shows. How can we become more like Wesley, who instead of saying “Someone ought to help those hungry people” took simple, direct action & helped? (To help with clean water, visit www.iThirst.org)

Prayer: Loving Lord, you taught us that “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Keep growing a heart within me that rejoices in the freedom & satisfaction of your kind of giving. Amen.

Thursday

Isaiah 1:11-18, 42:1-7 “Where is the justice?... Where is the mercy?”

The prophet Isaiah pointed out, on God’s behalf, the injustices rampant in ancient Israel. Then, three times in four verses, Isaiah 42 said God’s servant would bring justice. John Wesley visited one “poor prisoner,” falsely charged with a large offense instead of the petty crime he’d committed. He wrote indignantly, “2) Where is the justice of swelling four pounds into five hundred & seventy-seven? 3) Where is the common sense of taking up fourteen sheets to tell a story that may be told in ten lines? 4) Where is the mercy of thus grinding the face of the poor? thus sucking the blood of a poor, beggared prisoner?”

- Jesus quoted Isaiah 61 & 58 to define his mission: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners & recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed” (Luke 4:18). Do you think those were just symbolic words about spiritual captivity, or did Jesus, like Wesley, want to help actual “poor, beggared prisoners”? What are some practical ways you can live out God’s concern for justice today?

- In Isaiah 1:13, the prophet said on God’s behalf, “Stop bringing worthless offerings.” As you read the rest of the passage, what made their offerings “worthless”? With so much concern about identity theft & Internet scams, we know technology can make doing wrong more efficient. Can you think of

ways technology can also empower those who seek justice? What does it look like in South Africa in 2017 to “help the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow”?

Prayer: Lord God, sometimes trying to live out your justice can seem confusing—so many points of view, so many conflicting interests. Give me your wisdom to live a life that honours your ideal of justice. Amen.

FRIDAY

James 2:14-26 “That grand pest... a faith without works”

Wesley had learned first-hand the folly of trying to earn God’s favour through good works. But he found, as James had, that some other Christians thought “salvation by faith” meant good works are optional. In his sermon “The Mystery of Iniquity,” he said, “When St. James wrote his Epistle... that grand pest of Christianity, a faith without works, was spread far & wide; filling the Church with a ‘wisdom from beneath,’ which was ‘earthly, sensual, devilish.’” Like James, Wesley knew that true faith produces actions that honour God & bless others.

- James vividly pointed out the flaw in thinking that genuine faith could ever be limited to intellectual knowledge, to “the head”: “It’s good that you believe that God is one. Ha! Even the demons believe this, & they tremble with fear” (verse 19). Whose example most powerfully drew you to a faith that includes your heart & your hands as well as your head?

- Notice that James didn’t talk about a good “balance” between faith & works, as though we need a 50-50 mix of the two. We need 100% of both, & our works need to grow out of our faith, as a grateful response to God’s gracious acceptance of us. What are some of the actions, the works, which you have seen grow in your life as you have responded to God’s grace?

Prayer: Loving Lord, you have accepted me as your child, & you have begun to reshape the way I live as I respond to your grace. Please continue your work in my life, that my works may always bring you glory. Amen.

SATURDAY

Matthew 25:31-46 “Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, lodging the stranger”

Looking back, it’s easy to see that John Wesley & his followers made a big impact for good, first in Britain & then in America. Studying Wesley’s life reminds us that it didn’t happen with one big sermon or campaign. Many, many (often small) acts of grace & caring in the end changed the world.

In his sermon “The Reward of the Righteous,” Wesley urged his hearers, “While you are promoting this comprehensive charity, which contains feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, lodging the stranger; indeed all good works in one; let those animating words be written on your hearts, & sounding in your ears: ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto ME.’”

- The English word “charity” came from the Greek word *charis*, which meant “grace.” In Wesley’s day, it had not taken on the negative sense of dependence or humiliation we sometimes give it. His phrase “comprehensive charity which contains ... all good works in one” strikingly pictures the kind of life Jesus calls his followers to live. What are the main ways you are involved in honouring God by serving others? Consider making your service more “comprehensive” by serving in one way you never have before. (If you need ideas please contact the church office)

Prayer: O God, keep my eyes & my heart open to see your face in the faces of hurting people around me who need your touch through me. Amen.

PERSONAL NOTES

HOME GROUP MATERIAL

SUGGESTED PRAYER

O God, keep our eyes & hearts open to see your face in the faces of hurting people around us who need to feel your touch through us. Continue your work in our lives, that we may always bring you glory. Help us to embrace true justice & nurture a giving heart so that we might be your shining lights of love in the world. Amen.

CONNECT (5-10 minute discussion, at most)

Do you think that God primarily sees our world as occupied by a group of nations with political & geographic boundaries, by a collection of ethnic groups, by one gigantic human race, or by billions of individuals?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & STUDY

Read Matthew 5:13-16

Who was speaking in these verses, & to whom?

In what ways are some people the “salt & light” of the world?

How well are the Christians today fulfilling this mission?

Jesus' imagery pointed to a darkness & blandness in the world. What was he referring to?

How can we avoid becoming flavorless, or hiding our light under a basket?

FROM LAST WEEK

Did you reflect upon the poor coal miners of Wesley's time & similar people today? Did you consider in what ways, you could be involved in Wesley's work of sharing God's grace with areas with no schools or churches? Did you consider whether God was calling you in any way to get more involved in sharing “beyond the walls” of the church? This week, share with the group any ideas or learnings you had in this reflection.

FINAL APPLICATION

This week, consider making your service more “comprehensive” by serving in one way you never have before. If you need ideas, please contact the church office & speak to Lael. Start by asking yourself what you already are doing, then prayerfully seek insight into other things you might also do. Try at least one new activity. Next week, share with the group whatever you discovered.

Week 6

THE LATTER YEARS

Romans 13:11-12

You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness & put on the armour of light.

MONDAY

Chronicles 6:19-21, 40-42 “God was eminently present in the midst of the congregation”

75-year-old John Wesley led in building City Road Chapel in London in 1778. Wesley wrote about the day when the Chapel opened in his Journal: “I preached on part of Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple [today’s Scripture reading]; & both in the morning & afternoon... God was eminently present in the midst of the congregation.”

- Solomon invested a lot of time & resources in building the Temple in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Kings 6). Yet in verse 21, he specifically referred to God’s “heavenly dwelling place”—he knew God wasn’t limited to any one earthly building. But his prayer confidently asked God, “May your eyes be open & your ears attentive to the prayers of this place.” Which places of worship have particularly helped you draw near to God, & sense that God was attentive to you & your needs?
- Solomon’s prayer reflected his sense that the Temple’s deepest value lay, not in its furnishings or design, but in God’s presence in the people who worshipped there. John Wesley knew that, too, & described his City Road Chapel as “perfectly neat, but not fine, & contains far more people than the Foundry.” Which impresses you more: a church building’s external furnishings & finery, or the inner beauty of God’s work in human hearts through the ministry in that structure?

Prayer: Today, O Lord, I join Solomon in praying, “Lord, my God, listen to your servant’s prayer & request, & hear the cry & prayer that I your servant pray to you.” Amen.

TUESDAY

Romans 13:8-14, 1 John 4:11-16 “Diffuse the religion of love”

The City Road Chapel, like any building, was important, not as a monument to John Wesley or the early Methodists, but as a tool God could use to awaken & revive hearts. When they laid the Chapel’s foundation, Wesley urged those present, “Let our hearts be joined herein; let us unite our wishes & prayers; let our whole soul pant after a general revival of pure religion & undefiled, the restoration of the image of God, pure love, in every

child of man! ... let us, with all diligence, diffuse the religion of love among all we [interact] with.”

- The apostle Paul called Christians in Rome to revive their faith, & the way of life that faith produced. John Wesley’s message of God’s free grace, & the holy lives our response to grace produces, revived Christianity across Britain, & on the American continent. In what ways do you need a similar revival in your own walk with God? How might your changed life inspire revival in the lives of others you rub elbows with often?
- People often think “righteous” people are not very pleasant to be around, that being a Christian makes you judgmental & unloving. That was not the apostle John’s view! John Wesley quoted his words, urging Methodists, “Let us provoke all men, not to enmity & contention, but to love & good works; always remembering those deep words... ‘God is love; & he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, & God in him!’” In what ways has following Christ made you & your relationships more loving?

Prayer: Living Lord, please help me to take in, & then live out, “the religion of love.” I want to live in love, to live in you & to have you live in me. Amen.

WEDNESDAY

Luke 9:23-26 “Be a good steward”

The early Methodists’ faith tended to lead them to work harder, be more trustworthy & honest & less inclined to squander their money on drink, gambling or other things. Their growing wealth concerned Wesley. In one sermon, he said, “Having first gained all you can, & secondly saved all you can, then give all you can.” In another, he urged, “Touching this point of denying ourselves, & taking up our cross daily... sit as loose to all things here below, as if you were a poor beggar. Be a good steward of the manifold gifts of God.”

- How would you define “materialism”? The *MacMillan Dictionary* defines it as “the belief that money & possessions are the most important aspects of human existence.” In what central ways did Jesus’ teaching & way of life point to a completely different view of what is most important in human

existence? How have you found your faith in Jesus altering the materialistic assumptions our culture tends to teach us?

- Even as Wesley told the Methodists, “Having first gained all you can, & secondly saved all you can, then give all you can,” he surely knew human nature would be far more inclined to follow the first & second precepts than the third. Are you more generous with your material possessions than you were a year ago? In what ways can you cooperate with God to loosen the grip of material things on your heart & mind?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I like to gain as much as I can, & sometimes I like to save, too. Grow in me a heart that takes just as much delight in giving as much as I can to honour you & to bless the lives of others. Amen.

THURSDAY

Matthew 25:19-23 “To clothe them that needed it most”

John Wesley himself remained a “good & faithful servant.” He made one of the most remarkable entries in his Journal when he was 81. He wrote, “On this & the four following days I walked through the town & begged two hundred pounds in order to clothe them that needed it most. But it was hard work as most of the streets were filled with melting snow... so that my feet were steeped in snow water nearly from morning till evening.”

- Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25 did not tie either servant’s “good & faithful” quality to the amount he brought the master. (The second servant brought less than the first servant began with!) It was their energy & willingness to do the master’s will that made each one a good & faithful servant. In what particular ways is God calling you to serve? How are you energetic & willing in answering the call & doing your master’s will?

- Richard Foster, well-known author of *Celebration of Discipline*, also wrote *Freedom of Simplicity*. He gave the first chapter the paradoxical title “The Complexity of Simplicity.” Jesus calls us all to live with Wesley’s spirit of devotion to God & service to others. The complexity comes as we realize that it won’t do to simply imitate all of his actions. How do you cultivate a listening heart, a spirit receptive to God’s direction? What do you believe it means for you to be a “good & faithful servant”?

Prayer: Lord God, this day I face many choices. Guide me by your Spirit, that I may make those choices in ways that honour you as my King & my Lord. Amen.

FRIDAY

Corinthians 15:51-58 “Fortify us against the fear of death”

The apostle Paul reminded Christians in Corinth that when Jesus rose from the grave, he conquered death. Death has been “swallowed up by a victory.” In John Wesley’s sermon “On the Resurrection of the Dead,” he drew on Paul’s words, & said, “Let this especially fortify us against the fear of death: It is now disarmed, & can do us no hurt.” He taught Methodists to die “a good death,” free from fear & facing life’s end “in calm assurance.”

- When we or someone we love faces death, we often use “combat” language, saying things like “she lost the battle.” Paul, quoting the prophet Hosea, denied that death “wins”: “Where is your victory, Death?” (cf. Hosea 13:14) That confidence was central to Wesley’s “good death” idea. For a Christian, death is not a defeat, but a transition into a new phase of our victorious walk with Christ. Does the thought of death cause you fear & anxiety? How can internalizing the meaning of Jesus’ resurrection lead you toward the “calm assurance” Wesley spoke of?

- Death separates us from those who die, & the separation hurts—we miss our loved ones. But in verse 54, Paul said we’ll receive a body that can’t die. Thanks to Jesus’ victorious resurrection, Christians know this separation is only temporary! Christians trust that God will reunite all of God’s children. Have you felt the sting of separation death causes? How does the hope found in Christ’s victory over death help you to face the sting of separation from those who die?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you went where most of us most dread going—the realm of death—and you emerged victorious! Teach me how to claim your victory, & to live, & die, in the calm assurance of your eternal love & life. Amen.

SATURDAY

Psalm 146:1-2, 5-10 “I will sing praises to my God as long as I live”

John Wesley died on March 2, 1791, three months short of his 88th birthday. As his long life ebbed away, Wesley spoke the oft-quoted words of faith: “The best of all is, God is with us.” With his final breaths, he tried to sing Isaac Watts’ hymn, based on Psalm 146: “I’ll praise my Maker while I’ve breath, & when my voice is lost in death, praise shall employ my nobler powers. My days of praise shall ne’er be past, while life, & thought, & being last, or immortality endures.” He modelled the “good death” that he had preached & taught.

- The second stanza of Watts’ hymn further expanded on the themes of Psalm 146: “Happy are they whose hopes rely on Israel’s God, who made the sky & earth & seas, with all their train; whose truth for ever stands secure, who saves th’oppressed & feeds the poor, for none shall find God’s promise vain.” In what ways is it true of you that your hopes rely, not on your own aptitudes, accomplishments or possessions, but on Israel’s God? How can you join the psalmist, Isaac Watts & John Wesley in declaring confidently, “I’ll praise my Maker while I’ve breath”?

Prayer: Dear God, you have touched my life, as well as many others, through your work in the life of the psalmist, of Isaac Watts & of John Wesley. In big ways or small, as you choose, use my life, too, as a channel of your grace & blessing in our world. Amen.

PERSONAL NOTES

HOME GROUP MATERIAL

SUGGESTED PRAYER

Dear Lord, you have touched our lives through the work of people like John & Charles Wesley. You were victorious over death & we have received the benefits. Teach us to live & die in calm assurance, guiding us in our daily choices, giving generously, loving fully, & praying incessantly. In your holy name we pray. Amen.

CONNECT (5-10 minute discussion, at most)

John Wesley died on March 2, 1791, three months short of his 88th birthday. As his long life ebbed away, Wesley spoke the oft-quoted words of faith: “The best of all is, God is with us.” With his final breaths, he tried to sing Isaac Watts’ hymn, based on Psalm 146: “I’ll praise my Maker while I’ve breath, & when my voice is lost in death, praise shall employ my nobler powers. My days of praise shall ne’er be past, while life, & thought, & being last, or immortality endures.” He modeled the “good death” that he had preached & taught. With this in mind, how would you describe a “good death”?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & STUDY

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-58.

As Christians, why won’t our mortal death mean that we have been defeated & “lost the battle”?

Does the thought of death cause you fear & anxiety? What about the way you die?

Wesley urged us to “die a ‘good death’, free from fear & facing life’s end ‘in calm assurance.’” How great is that challenge to you?

What makes you confident in your eventual immortality?

FROM LAST WEEK

Did you consider making your service more “comprehensive” by serving in one way you never have before? Did you start by asking yourself what you already were doing, then prayerfully seek insight into other things you might also do? Did you try at least one new activity? Please share with the group whatever you discovered.

FINAL APPLICATION

This week, review the following article on dying well. Consider the reality of your own death with the goal of having a healthy attitude about the process of living & dying in calm assurance for God's glory. Next week, share with the group whatever you discover.

DYING WELL ACCORDING TO JOHN WESLEY

The ars moriendi (or “art of dying”) was a body of literature that helped Christians prepare for death. Wesley discovered the riches of the tradition by reading Jeremy Taylor’s book, *The Rule & Exercises of Holy Dying*. Wesley’s mediation of the art of dying was so successful that the early Methodists were known for their “good deaths.” A physician who treated several Methodists made the claim to Charles Wesley, “Most people die for fear of dying; but, I never met with such people as yours. They are none of them afraid of death, but [are] calm, & patient, & resigned to the last.”

What did John Wesley & the early Methodists know that allowed them to die with such grace & assurance? First, Wesley faced the reality of death. We live in a death-denying culture. Not only does death tend to be a taboo subject, but we isolate ourselves from the sick & dying. Most of us find it relatively easy to ignore our own mortality until tragedy strikes close to home. Wesley, however, sought out the dying because he desired not only to help them in their final days, but he wanted to learn from those who were going through the dying process. In his journal, Wesley recorded, “Here I found E- R- weaker & happier than ever. Her life seemed spun out to the last thread. I spent half an hour with her, to teach her, at once, & learn of her, to die.”

Furthermore, Wesley realized that ignoring death cheats us of the opportunity to examine the condition of our soul & to attain peace with God. “Do you never think about [death]?” he asked in his address titled, “A Word to an Unhappy Woman.” “Why do you not? Are you never to die? Nay, it is appointed for all men to die. & what comes after? Only heaven or hell. Will the not thinking of death, put it farther off? No; not a day; not one hour.” Contemplating the end of our earthly existence allows us time to examine our standing with God in a focused & honest way. To leave such matters until the very end of life unnecessarily burdens the dying process with uncertainty & anxiety.

Most importantly, Wesley knew the secret to dying well was living well. Keeping our end in view reminds us that life is a precious gift from God & should not be squandered on penultimate pursuits.

The Spirit of God was so clearly evident in the deaths of the Methodists that Wesley regularly published various accounts of deathbed scenes to encourage believers in the faith. A common theme among these accounts was this: the manner in which the Methodists died was simply a continuation of the way they had conducted their lives. Reflecting on the death of William Green, a steadfast believer who trusted God through the storms of life, Wesley mused, “He died, as he lived, in the full assurance of faith, praising God with his latest breath.” Of another believer Wesley penned, “She was a woman of faith & prayer; in life & death adorning the doctrine of God her Saviour.”

Just as learning the “art” of any worthwhile craft takes time & effort, so the art of dying well requires our full attention. This does not mean we become fatalistic or develop an unhealthy fixation on death. Rather, as believers, we abide in the knowledge that a good death is a culmination of a life lived for the glory of God – no matter what the length of that life may be.

More at the source: <http://seedbed.com/feed/dying-well-according-to-john-wesley/>

PERSONAL NOTES
