



## How Firm Is Your Foundation?

Text: Don Adams. Top 10 United Methodist Beliefs. Abingdon Press.

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These notes can be found at: <https://davidbissette.com>

### Part one: Awakenings and John Wesley (Intro and Chapter 1)

We're here to take a look at Methodists beliefs—*which can sound a little dry*. Luckily, it isn't! For one thing, we can't accomplish our goal without taking a look at John Wesley, who was an amazing person. It's not that what Wesley taught is unique in Christianity—Methodism is not a cult. It's just that Wesley taught the basics of Christianity so well and lived them out thoroughly in his life. He was also so effective at helping others to do the same. He spoke with clarity and passion, and his compassion for others was as palpable as his works were visible.

But, what happened during his life wasn't just because Wesley was such an amazing person. God was doing something on a bigger scale in the world during his lifetime that helps to explain the success of his ministry.



# Awakenings: the context for our study

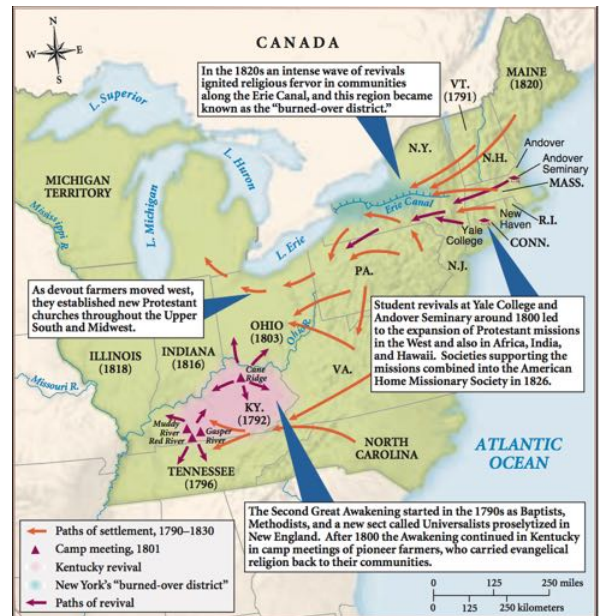
- **Awakenings, revivals, resurgences, outpourings of the Holy Spirit**

- Often worldwide in scope
- Involved multiple denominations in existence, started others
- Social effects are dramatic: courts had no one to try for crimes, abolition of slavery promoted, schools, hospitals, care for poor

- **A striking example—The *Second* Great Awakening**

- J. Edwin Orr is a great source of information (<https://jedwinorr.com/resources/articles/prayandrevival.pdf>)
- After American Revolution (starting 1781): “moral slump” in the U.S.
  - Out of a population of five million, 300,000 were confirmed “drunkards”
  - Profanity was of the “most shocking kind”.
  - First time in the history of the American settlement, women were afraid to go out at night for fear of assault.
  - Bank robberies were a daily occurrence.
  - Methodists losing more members than they were gaining.
  - Baptists said that they had their most wintry season.
  - Presbyterians in general assembly deplored the nation's ungodliness.
  - In a typical Congregational church in Lennox, Massachusetts, the minister did not take one young person into fellowship for 16 years.
  - The Lutherans were so languishing that they discussed uniting with Episcopalians who were even worse off.
  - The Protestant Episcopal Bishop of New York decided he was out of work, so he took up other employment.
  - The Chief Justice of the United States, John Marshall, wrote to the Bishop of Virginia, James Madison, that the Church 'was too far gone ever to be redeemed.'
  - Voltaire averred and Tom Paine echoed, “Christianity will be forgotten in thirty years.”
  - Harvard - poll found no believers in the whole student body.
  - Princeton, a much more evangelical place - poll found two believers in the student body, and only five that did not belong to the “filthy speech movement” of that day.
  - Mock communion at Williams College, and they put on anti-Christian plays at Dartmouth. They burned down the Nassau Hall (which once served as the U.S. capitol) at Princeton. They forced the resignation of the president of Harvard. They took a Bible from a local Presbyterian church in New Jersey and burned it in a public bonfire. Christians were so few on campus in the 1790's that they met in secret, like a communist cell, and kept their minutes in code so that no one would know.

- Awakening began in England, Europe, then US, and South Africa. Church membership grew tremendously, with a focus on personal commitment to Christ. This awakening is usually described as most closely associated with the US.
- Results included a momentum to abolish slavery and promote popular education, improvements in women's rights, prison reform, and care for the handicapped and mentally ill. Bible Societies were created to promote the reading of Scripture, and Sunday Schools and many secular social benefits accompanied the evangelistic drive.



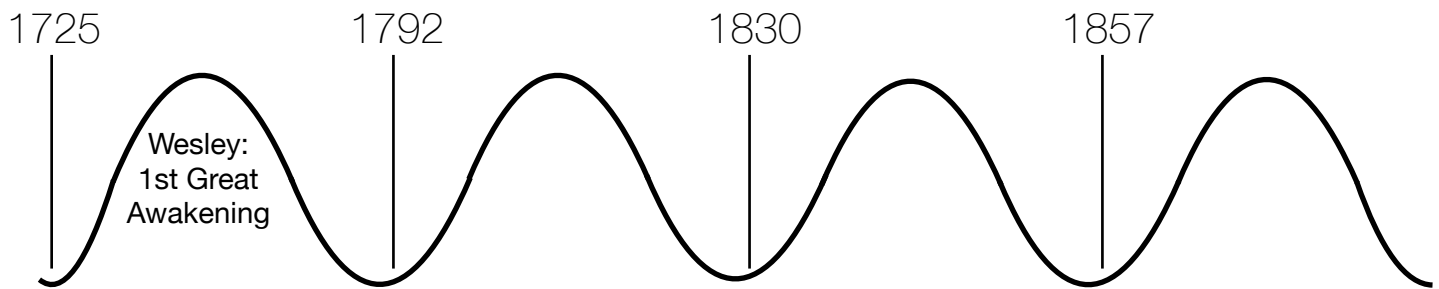
### Sample list from 18th to 20th century

#### • 1725 onward—The First Great Awakening

- Included Germany, Britain, then to the colonies
- John Wesley, “Holy Club”, “enthusiasts”, “methodists”, George Whitefield
- Whitefield convinced Wesley to preach outdoors...which was unheard of
- Violent opposition arose. At times Wesley barely escaped with his life.
- 10% of population of New England (30k of 300k) joined churches in two years
- Six universities came out of this movement: Brown, Columbia, Dartmouth, U of Pennsylvania, Princeton, and Rutgers.
- Pres. Calvin Coolidge in paying tribute to Francis Asbury: “America was born in a Revival of Religion”, observing that John Wesley and George Whitefield were the back of it. Asbury was an early abolitionist.
- In England secular historian Sir Charles Robertson wrote: “Methodism and the French Revolution are the two most tremendous phenomena of the century.”



- **1792 onward—The Second Great Awakening** (discussed above)
- **1830 onward**
  - A resurgence of the previous awakening/revival that lasted about 12 years
  - Methodist Episcopal Church in US doubled membership in 2 years
  - North and South Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Polynesia, Hawaii, and South Africa all were affected
  - Charles Finney was known for his effectiveness in the U.S. as a minister and speaker, and spoke boldly against slavery and refused communion to slaveholders.
  - Significant social betterment also resulted (hospitals, orphanages, “asylums”, YMCA, etc.)
- **1857, 1882, 1904, Between WW I & WW II, 1948, 1960’s-80’s (“Jesus Movement”)**



plus 1882, 1904, Between WW I & WW II, 1948, 1960’s-80’s, ??

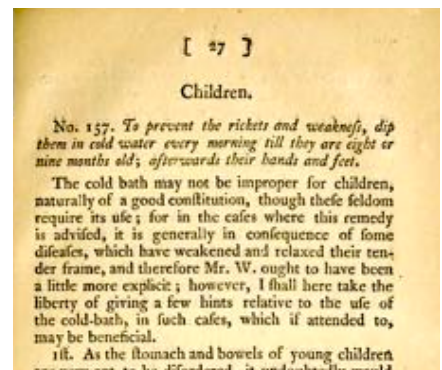
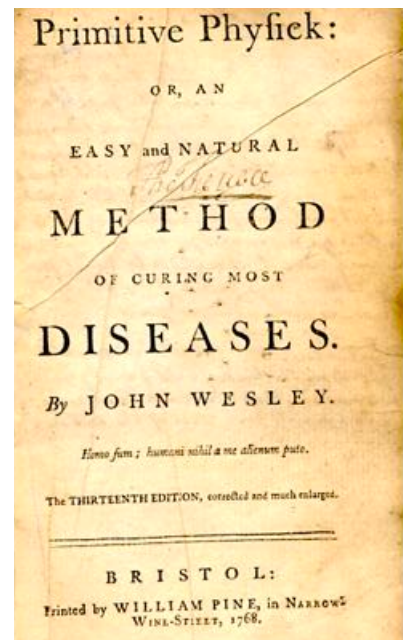
The above chart is not to “scale” in that the time periods for these awakenings/revivals are not so evenly spaced, and their intensity varied.

# John Wesley 1703-1791

Up to age 10	<p>15th child of Susanna and Samuel Wesley (Oxford grad, poet, minister). Susanna was 25th child of her parents and bore 19 children (9 lived past infancy). John and all his siblings were taught to read as soon as they could walk. Expected to be proficient in Latin and Greek and to memorize major portions of New Testament. Mom interviewed each of them each day for spiritual instruction.</p>	
11-20	At age 11 went to school in London, then to Oxford U like his father.	
21-30	<p>Stayed on to get his Masters, and taught at Lincoln College at Oxford. Afterwards served two years as a parish priest to assist his father. He eventually returned to Oxford to teach. His brother, now a student at Oxford, had started the “Holy Club” as other students called them. When Wesley returned he led the club, known for its prayer and twice-weekly fasting. They were also called “enthusiasts” (think fanatics) and eventually “methodists” because of their regular practices.</p>	
31-40	<p>He journeyed to Savannah, GA to be a minister there. During a huge storm he was deeply affected by a group of Moravians on the ship who calmly sang hymns and prayed during the storm. Upon arriving he led a group of Christian “societies”, as they were called, for two years. He fell in love, but felt he should not be married at that time, and he handled it badly after his romantic interest married another man. He left the church in the midst of the ensuing conflict and returned to England depressed.</p> <p>He attended Moravian meetings there and on May 24, 1738 (almost 35 yrs old), at a meeting on Aldersgate St., he felt his heart “strangely warmed” while listening to someone read Martin Luther’s preface to Romans. Known as the “Aldersgate experience”, it was a turning point for him in which he felt a spiritual freedom of “salvation by faith alone.”</p> <p>He then went to Germany to study with the Moravians for a while. Upon his return George Whitfield, a friend from Oxford, invited him to speak outdoors...something which to Wesley was almost heresy. Wesley eventually agreed, and his broader ministry was launched. He eventually broke with the Moravians and began the Methodist Society. Much persecution followed from fellow Anglicans because of his use of lay ministers. Wesley organized his fellow worshippers in his usual methodical way.</p>	
41-50	<p>Wesley participated in building the Methodist church, though he still considered himself to be carrying out his ministry as part of the Church of England. As you may have guessed by now, he was methodical in his actions. He attempted to provide a pathway for people to grow spiritually via a variety of methods, including teaching, small groups, and encouraging others to engage in charitable actions.</p>	
51-60		
61-70		
71-80		
81-87	<p>Wesley died at the age of 87. Because of his charitable work he died poor. His church at that time had 135,000 members and 541 itinerant preachers. Today the Methodist church has 75 million adherents in 130 countries.</p>	

# A few additional notes about Wesley's life

- When young John was not yet six years old a fire broke out in the rectory at Epworth, possibly set by one of his father's enemies in the parish. John was rescued when one neighbor stood on the other's shoulders and pulled him through the window seconds before the roof crashed. Wesley often referred to himself as a "brand plucked out of the fire" (Zech 3:2).
- It is said that he rode 250,000 miles on horseback to give more than 40,000 evangelistic sermons. He organized the teaching of new Christians, eventually starting churches through a network of itinerant preachers
- He wrote, edited, or abridged some 400 books on theology, music, physics, medicine for the everyday person (32 editions), marriage, abolitionism, and politics.
- He spoke 8 languages, and wrote grammars in 6 of them.
- His library included more than 1,400 authors
- He was a supporter for an active role of women in the church, including public speaking and teaching
- He married unhappily at age 48 to a widow, Mary Vazeille. She left him 15 years later—saying that he was too busy building a church to have time for her.
- One of his most famous sayings is: "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can." However, an actual quote of it by him from his times cannot be found.



## Discussion

- Questions about the material
- Watch surprised you most?
- What was most helpful?

# Homework

- Read Intro and Beliefs 1 & 2 This is an unusual amount of reading, but worth it.
- Read over notes from today's class. (<https://davidbissette.com>) Look at the additional material if interested. The video by Adam Hamilton is about 10 minutes.
- Pray once per day (upon rising?) for our class and for the thing you most want to get out of it. Consider it an experiment.

# Part two: The Bible

## (Chapter 2)

### Conjunctive theology

- Conjunctive theology: not an “either/or” but a “both/**and**” (conjunction) view of truth.
- Wesley was not simplistic in his understanding of the Bible. He was comfortable with the belief that the Bible needed interpretation. He is famous for his quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience—all helpful in understanding scripture
- Conjunctive theology involved understanding and embracing opposites...and living with the tension this involved. It is a “wisdom” approach to the Bible, not a “rulebook” approach.
  - Proverbs 26:4-5
    - 4 Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you yourself will be just like him.
    - 5 Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.
- For him the Christian life brought peace of mind and heart through faith in Christ...yet there exists the tension of working “out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”
  - Wesley was known for his emphasis on both salvation by faith and the need for good works to “prove” that faith.
- A. W. Tozer summarized it well: “Truth is like a bird. It cannot fly on one wing. Yet we are forever trying to take off with one wing flapping furiously and the other tucked neatly out of sight.”
- Charles Simeon, contemporary of Wesley, also said something similar: “Truth is not in the middle, and not in one extreme, but in both extremes.”
- Truth has also been called a two-sided coin, requiring wisdom to know which side applies in a situation. (Birds of a feather flock together, and opposites attract.)

### The primacy of scripture

From the Methodist statement of faith:

- “We believe the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, reveals the Word of God so far as it is necessary for our salvation. It is to be received through the Holy Spirit as the true rule and guide for faith and practice. Whatever is not revealed in or established by the Holy Scriptures is not to be made an article of faith nor is it to be taught as essential to salvation.”
- The Methodist Church has no statement about whether the Bible is inerrant

*However...the Bible can be difficult to understand, even the words of Jesus.*



- It can be confusing for a variety of reasons.
  - 1 Corinthians 13:12 NRSV For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.
  - Jesus’ disciples didn’t understand things he said, even when they heard them in person.
    - Mark 4:10-13 When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that,
 

‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,  
and ever hearing but never understanding;  
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’”

Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable?”

## The quadrilateral

Wesley taught that the Bible, our primary source of spiritual teaching, is best understood in the context of additional insights offered by tradition, reason, and experience.

- Scripture—is our primary source of teaching. In addition, our understanding of it can be enlightened, but not replaced by the following:
- Tradition—Wesley felt that information from the early church can shed much light on the Bible and on healthy Christian practices in ones life.
- Reason—assisted by the Holy Spirit is important to discern the truths of scripture
- Experience—validates the truth of scripture in our lives, but does not supplant it. Example: changed feelings, thoughts, and behavior after becoming a Christian.
- Where to look for help
  - Beyond the Bible itself sources include: commentaries, books about biblical history, dictionaries, atlases, people you know (both Christian and secular) and other various resources of all sorts.

## A three-fold approach to scripture

- ☆ In your study of the Bible, search for **Wisdom**
- ☆ In your search for Wisdom, pay attention to **Context**
- ☆ In your study of Context, look for **Trajectory**

This requires perseverance, humility, and patience

# Wisdom

- Is the Bible a rule book or a pathway to wisdom—wisdom that we can learn to apply to our current lives in our day?
  - Rules are limited in their application. They may fit one context but not another. Wisdom can be applied anywhere.

- The primacy of wisdom in scripture

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: “To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.”

“The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world’s first bits of soil. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit,

so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world

and delighting in the human race.”

Proverbs 3:19 By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place

I Corinthians 1:30 NRSV He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption...

Colossians 3:16 ESV Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

- The big picture—how do we find this wisdom? We start with the text itself. Think in terms of the quadrilateral mentioned above to help give you a breadth of study.
- Prayer can help in your understanding—it is not to be underestimated. Be still and listen to God for insights about a passage. D.L. Moody said, “The Christian on his knees sees more than the philosopher on tiptoe.”
- Of course, knowledge is important and is a part of our goal also, but it is easy to make that a substitute goal. **Wisdom involves action, knowledge doesn’t.**

# Context

- Context is a broad topic and requires study
- “What would I understand from this passage if I were living in that time and it was directed to me?”
- Context requires wisdom to find more wisdom
  - Quote from Peter Enns (How the Bible Really Works): “...it has struck me over the years that some of the most important pieces of literature in the entire Bible are personal letters written two thousand years ago by people I’ve never met named Paul, Peter, James, John, and some others and intended for people I absolutely know nothing about in places I am not remotely familiar with in a culture I really cannot hope to grasp.”

“As one of my seminary professors said, ‘Reading the New Testament is like reading someone else’s mail.’ That might be the most valuable thing I ever learned in seminary. And now I pass it on to you, at a far lower cost. And yet, this is not mail we are supposed to stuff back in a mailbox. We are supposed to read these letters—and not only read them, but find some way to draw them into our own lives. Think about that for a minute. I think about it a lot. And it doesn’t really matter that we might think these letters are inspired by God. That still leaves the question of why God would decide to inspire context-dependent personal correspondence and expect us to “get it” two thousand years later in a very—I will say it again, very—different time and place. Doesn’t God realize that we don’t share the common understanding that, say, Paul shares with the people in Corinth or Thessalonica? Doesn’t God realize that making twenty-one of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament letters means that we will have to think—really think—about what these letters were meant to do and then be really thoughtful and intentional, maybe even humble, about how to engage them for ourselves? Doesn’t God know that we will have to exercise tremendous—what’s that word again? Oh, yes—wisdom in order to know how or even if these words will apply to others in their own context-dependent situations? Leaving the snark aside, I think that letters are the perfect format for a sacred book that is not intended as a helicopter-parenting manual, but as a source of wisdom. We can’t simply just drag these letters into our own life as is. We have to work at ***finding the connection between then and now.***”

- In other words, we have to understand the “then” to get to the “now”
- There are many different aspects to context
  - What are the surrounding biblical texts...what happened before and after the passage?
  - What is the context in the whole of the Bible and its timeline
  - The nature of the author’s life and experience
  - Knowledge about the people to whom it was written, the society, their current religious beliefs, and their language...which can be huge

- Again...what would I understand from this passage if I were living in that time and it was directed to me?
- Be willing to suspend understanding until you find an answer that satisfies both your mind and your heart/emotions...even if it takes months or sometimes years. Don't force an understanding. And don't expect to always be right. Understanding can take time...don't panic.
  - I once asked a pastor friend of mine what to do when I run across a passage while reading scripture that really bothers me and that I don't understand. His answer was, "Keep on reading. Perhaps you will understand at a later time." In other words, put in the back of my mind for another day, and continue to read what I do understand.
  - Example of Wesley and Whitfield: These two men had different understandings about free-will versus predestination that were never resolved. But they were both used mightily in the same Great Awakening. They did not need to have the same opinion as one another about this particular topic to be effective in their ministries. Someone naively asked Whitfield if he expected to see Wesley in heaven, since Wesley did not subscribe to Whitfield's beliefs about "predestination". Whitfield said no, he didn't expect to see Wesley in heaven. He went on to say that he expected Wesley to be so much closer to the Great Throne of God than himself that he would probably be out of sight. Nice.

## Trajectory

- Trajectory, as we are using it here, is a pattern of change that takes place over time that seems to have a particular direction. When we think of it relative to biblical interpretation it has to do with continuing a pattern of thought or action into the future from the original timeline. *For us we often think of it as bringing the message home to **our time** in order to understand how to live our lives.*
- Differing beliefs about trajectories are often points of controversy among Christians. Some people take more of a rule book approach and don't lean toward including a "trajectory way of thinking" as much as others. No one currently disagrees about slavery, while many do disagree about homosexuality, for example.
  - Interesting note: Our own Supreme Court faces the same issue with interpreting the Constitution. To some degree it is the job of the Supreme Court to interpret the Constitution in the same way that it is our job to interpret the Bible. Some justices hold to the "original meaning" view while others want to apply the original concerns of our founders "updated" to our current time and circumstances.
- Examples
  - Slavery—The Bible doesn't actually condemn slavery, and during the Civil War the Bible was used to support **both** sides of the slave argument.

- In the Old Testament, as well as the New, slavery was an accepted practice
  - Exodus 21:20-21 (NIV) “Anyone who beats their male or female slave with a rod must be punished if the slave dies as a direct result, but they are not to be punished if the slave recovers after a day or two, since the slave is their property.”
- In the New Testament
  - In terms of context, Roman slavery in New Testament times was very different than slavery as we think of it in the United States. It included all races, and many slaves held professional positions. It was not unusual for a slave to be able to purchase his or her freedom after a number of years and become Roman citizens with limited rights. Nevertheless it was wrong, of course.
  - Though the Bible did not record instances of Jesus or Christian writers as addressing slavery as a social practice to be condemned. Paul did push the social boundaries of his day when he claimed that slaves are equal to free persons in God’s eyes. This emphasis was new.
 

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.”
  - Jesus said we are to love our neighbor as ourself. It’s rather hard to say you’re loving your neighbor if you own him and deprive him of freedom.
  - Thus Paul and Jesus planted the seeds for the downfall of slavery, and trajectory thinking was needed from Christians in the US to win the argument regarding slavery in the United States. “Original meaning” people wanted to keep slavery intact.
- Role of women
  - In the Old Testament wives were considered to be property of their husbands, a view which to some degree at least, appears to have been carried over to the New Testament times. Women were not very active in public life, though there were exceptions.
  - However, Paul included women in his statement in Gal. 3:28 above, and in Romans 16:7 Paul praises a woman named Junia as a prominent apostle. Though elsewhere he talks about women remaining silent at church, he signals a change in the way women were perceived in biblical times, including their leadership in the church.
- There are also trajectories in scripture that help us to understand the context of biblical history.
  - Example: The more war-like nature of God in the Old Testament versus the more gentle view of God in Jesus in the New. There are ways in which the Hebrew understanding of God changed over time. This is a complex topic, but it is a significant trajectory with important implications
- Trajectory is a powerful, important, and sometimes controversial aspect of understanding and applying scripture. At times a trajectory can feel scary to consider because it requires significant interpretation on our part and is certainly open to error. However, the

quadrilateral can help keep one grounded during that process. Trajectory is a rewarding and often necessary component of understanding how God would have us to live today.

## Discussion

- How does the Bible help and confuse you?
- What expectations do you bring with you to your reading of the Bible?

## Homework

1. Read Chapter 3
2. Pray for our class daily, and that you will get from the class what you intended when signing up

# Part three: Grace and discipleship

## (Chapter 3)

A word of clarification: The title of this book is a bit misleading. The actual top 10 beliefs of Methodists include a belief in the Trinity and other basic Christian beliefs—the same as many other denominations. The author’s goal here is to teach about the top 10 beliefs that Wesley emphasized in his ministry, which was partly influenced by the theological circumstances of his time. However, Wesley’s emphases are, for the most part, also timeless, and resulted in the grass roots movement that came to be known as Methodism.

### Role of effort in the Christian life

- Wesley: We are active, not passive, participants in God’s work in our lives. We are not simply pieces of clay on whom God works.
- Context of Wesley’s times: controversy between predestination and free will
  - As we have said before Wesley and Whitfield disagreed about the degree to which people have a choice about accepting God’s offer of salvation. Whitfield said it was entirely a work of God, without any human will being involved, while Wesley said that people could reject God’s offer of salvation. Wesley’s perspective prevailed in Methodism, and prevenient grace is a part of that viewpoint.
- Prevenient grace
  - The “natural man” apart from a relationship with God is not without **some** measure of grace. That was God’s prevenient grace starting point for us. The outpouring of God’s Spirit in awakenings is another example of God’s prevenient grace. God acted first, and then there was a response by people.
  - In summary, God enables us to take whatever the next step is spiritually by bringing us to the point that we are able to make a choice. Then God enables us to take another step, if we are again willing. God acts first, then we must act on what God has made possible for us to choose.
  - Stuck? AA has a great suggestion: If you lack willingness, pray for it. Good advice.
  - When it comes to deciding to obey God, conjunctive theology is everywhere. Jesus says that his burden is light, and he also says “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” A cross is **not** light. Apparently, what makes the difficult side of this contrast possible is an experience of the love and power of God through the Holy Spirit. This is a life-changing experience.
- Apart from salvation itself another controversy related to human effort was prevalent in New Testament times—the faith/works controversy that resulted from the writings of Paul and James.

- James 2:14 says: “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?”
- Paul says in Ephesians 2:8–9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”
- Wesley held that works were the sure sign of “regeneration” (being born anew), but in no way the cause of it
- In terms of outward evidence vs inward change it’s not an either/or question. Jesus uses the example of a tree: “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.” (Matt 7:18) A tree and its fruit will match.
- Thus we have Wesley’s emphasis on both faith and good deeds.
  - In AA, if you want to improve your self-esteem you are told to do esteemable things. From a Christian perspective we are also the beneficiaries of our own good works when we do them from a good heart—**for others and unto God.**
- How does all this happen...this miracle of generosity within us that results in good works?
  - It is the result of faith **in (not about)** God—a faith that results in relationship, which in turn transforms us by its effect on us.
    - It’s one thing to believe that planes can fly, it’s quite another to get on one and entrust your life to it and its pilot. The second is biblical faith.

## Discipleship, grace, and the Holy Spirit

- When we talk about discipleship and grace, we cannot do so without talking about the Holy Spirit
- Awareness of the ministry of the Holy Spirit (which we will only touch upon here) is fundamental to the Christian life
- The Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives is a gift of grace that makes possible everything good that we believe and do.
- The Holy Spirit was active in the lives of OT believers
  - Psalm 51:10-13 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and *renew a steadfast spirit* within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and *grant me a willing spirit*, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.
- However, in the New Testament Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem after his ascension until the gift of the Holy Spirit was given. *Then* they were to spread throughout the world to make disciples of others.
- Since then, the Holy Spirit is said to indwell believers and empower us to do the work of God.



- Ephesians 5: 17-20 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)
- Our relationship with the filling of the spirit is both critical and progressive. In one sense it begins when we begin to follow Christ and commit ourselves to him. In another it is progressive as our faith grows , and we allow the Spirit more room in our lives to act. When we follow the light we can see, and we are then are given more light to follow.
  - Romans 12:1-2 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is— His good, pleasing and perfect will.
  - This verse is often presented as an all-at-once event...and can produce quite a bit of guilt in a believer. But I believe it is a process that, enabled by the Spirit, gives us the grace to give the Spirit more room in our lives throughout our lives.
- Spiritual breathing, a great concept for spiritual practice
  - When we sin and experience ourselves “out of fellowship” with God
    - John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
  - We can then appropriate the power of the Spirit and continue to walk in the Spirit in our daily life as talked about in Ephesians above.

Summary: Walking in the Spirit by grace

- Example of golf: being in the “zone” is not entirely a matter of sheer effort. It has to with something we cannot control or simply will.

WE CAN DIRECTLY WILL...	BUT NOT...
knowledge	wisdom
pleasure	happiness
congratulations	admiration
reading	understanding
listening	hearing
going to bed	sleeping
meekness	humility
executing the play	winning the game
dryness	sobriety

The above table is found in: *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning* by Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, 1993.

## Homework

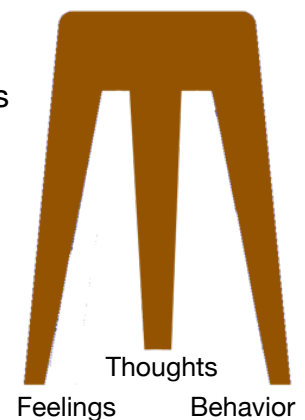
- Read chapters 4 and 5
- Continue to pray for our study and yourself to get your needs met.

# Part four: Early steps toward becoming a Christian

(Chapters 4 & 5)

Let's talk about our nature as people

- In psych, using the wise-mind model
  - Wisdom is when thoughts and feelings align
  - Some people are more driven by emotion and some by thoughts
  - We have our thoughts in our heads, but our feelings in our body
  - When we have trauma, we tend to abandon our body, where we have all of the awful feelings, and move into our heads. We then attempt to live our lives from there. Our life becomes more cognitive, and feelings (and close relationships) become more remote.
  - Some of us, due to the nature of our personalities, are more feelings oriented, and those feelings control our lives without the stability that solid thinking brings.
  - Thus, when our balance is out of whack, therapy attempts to bring them into balance. Thus cognitive therapy when depressed or anxious, and psychodynamic therapy when frozen in thoughts.
- However, there is another model—the three legged stool model
  - This adds behavior into the mix.
  - Any change in one of the three legs affects the other two. Thoughts, feelings, and behavior all affect each other. Thus, behavior therapy is added to the arsenal of basic therapeutic techniques.
  - AA has an interesting slogan: Act your way into feeling. Cognitive therapy says change your thoughts to change your feelings.
  - So—thoughts, feelings, and behavior are intertwined to form a whole person.
  - So Wesley was right in his balanced approach to living a spiritual life. We mustn't stop with "right doctrine", or just having an emotional experience, or going through the outward behaviors of being a religious person and think we have become a new (whole) person in Christ.



Overall, this chapter is about the beginning steps of becoming a Christian. Let's do a little experiment. Which of the following words has the greatest emotional pull on you?

family

marriage

holiness

worship

truth

friends

intelligence

To understand where the next few chapters are heading, let's step back for a minute and take a look at the big picture of what God is working towards in real time—as much as has been revealed to us.

- God wants to build a family that includes us...in eternity.
- God uses terms for us like “child of God” and bride of Christ, and uses both of the terms father and mother to describe his relationship to us. Jesus calls us brothers and sisters. (Hebrews 2:11-12 Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are **of the same family**. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. “I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.”)
- Who ever gets over their need for a parent?
- How much do people value long term relationships? Friendships? Children? Siblings?

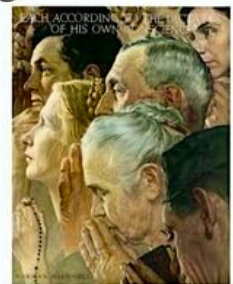
What else is it we want in life?

- The Four Freedoms were goals articulated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941 in his State of the Union address, 10 months before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. In it he proposed four fundamental freedoms that people "everywhere in the world" ought to enjoy:
  - Freedom of speech—to have our values spoken before others; to be ourselves out loud
  - Freedom of worship—to be able to have a relationship with God *in community, publicly*
  - Freedom from want—contentment and satisfaction in life
  - Freedom from fear—to feel secure
- His speech didn't have a particularly big impact on Americans until Normal Rockwell painted his famous Four Freedoms pictures for the covers of The Saturday Evening Post. They were used to raise money to fight the coming war.

## OURS...to fight for



*Freedom of Speech*



*Freedom of Worship*



*Freedom from Want*



*Freedom from Fear*

It turns out that the things we want in life and also what God wants for us.

When I finally seem to get a feel for these chapters, it became clear that our author was describing a **process** of becoming a Christian that takes place over time. He used Wesley's analogy of a house to describe that process. I took the time to go through the beginning of this session so that we could get a good sense of what this house is like that we are entering. That will have a great deal to do with our willingness to step across the threshold. The same may well be true of others.

Wesley and his lay associates spoke bravely and intensely about avoiding the coming wrath of God against the sinfulness of humankind. They were doing this during an awakening, when people were pretty open to the gospel and he had a lot of success...but he still was faced with violence many times for his message. So how do we invite people into this house today?

Our author pointed out that various part of the gospel message may work best depending on where a person stands in the process of responding to the gospel.

Every period of history will probably have some trait that would distract people or lure them away from the God whether it is the reason and science of the Enlightenment or something else.

One has to view God as at least interesting before being willing to devote ones life to God and Jesus. We must see our need for God before God may be viewed as important to us. Starting off with why Someone we're not even interested in might not like us may not be the best way to go. The same is true of how we talk to ourselves.

What makes the "house" of Christianity look inviting? What is it that we want that God has already given to us and continues to offer us? When we get there we may become willing to take a look at ourselves...and the process of repentance can begin.

We've been talking about theology in relational terms. That's the language God uses. That's what the Christian life is all about.

## Homework

1. Chapter 6
2. Continue to pray for our time together and that you get your needs met here so far as that is possible.

# Part five: About justification

## (Chapter 6)

### Goals for Today

1. Understand the nature of justification
2. Recall our own experiences of awareness regarding our own justification

### Justification = receiving a pardon

- In the Bible God is often referred to in one of two different roles: King or Father. However, when we speak of either King or Father, it's easy for some people to have negative connotations.
  - Regarding the term King: If we talk about the Kingdom of God, what is a kingdom without a king or queen? And since God is motivated by love, God is a ruler who loves, protects, and cares.
  - Regarding the term Father: The Lord's prayer itself starts off with "Our Father..." and if you can imagine a perfect father, the father of your dreams...that would be God, only God would be better still.
- Today's topic falls into the category of Kingly duties...maintaining justice and order in creation
  - That requires "setting limits". There must be a consequence for wrongdoing, or wrongdoing would become our experience forever—both committing it and suffering from it. Imagine if there was no consequence to theft, or if speed limits on the roads were never enforced. It would not be pretty.
    - Here is God's response to wrongdoing: Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the **gift** of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Death here is typically thought of as spiritual separation from God—in some ways a natural consequence of going apart from God on our own initiative.)
  - The big picture is that God's decisions about all this has not been arbitrary. There is wisdom here. God's goal has always been an eternal heaven populated by God's chosen family. For that to happen, God must be a gatekeeper of sorts to see that heaven does not become like earth has, full of people capable of violence and all sorts of ill will. God's invitation for all to join in the joy there has been real. However, we have been given the choice to accept or refuse the invitation.

# Where this pardon fits into the process of becoming a Christian

Our author has indicated that coming to the point of following Jesus—becoming a Christian—is a *process*, enabled by grace.

1. It starts with imagining that knowing God must, or at least even might, be a good thing.
  - Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, for anyone who comes to him must *believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*
2. It continues with developing remorse about our wrongdoings **and** our inability to live as we know we should. It includes an acknowledgment of guilt. This is an awareness enabled by God's grace.
3. We then commit ourselves to trust and follow Jesus...**accepting God's gift of mercy: God accepting Jesus's death as the accomplishment of the sentence that we would have received otherwise...** This is justification...the ***imputing*** of righteousness before the law (think of a courtroom) which we did not actually earn. Justification is the event that prevents us from experiencing the wages of sin forever.
4. And we then continue that commitment to live a new life by living according to the power granted to us by the indwelling Christ. This is called another big word—sanctification—***imparting*** the ability to choose to live a holy life, another act of God's grace.
  - Simply “accepting a deed to a new house” is not enough...we must also commit to being a “good neighbor”, so to speak. If we think that throwing down our “Jesus pays” card to cover a steady stream of willful, defiant acts, the issue of sincerity of repentance would arise, and it would be the “cheap grace” talked about in the text. Forgiveness is not a license to do wrong without consequence or concern.

## Discussion

- Is this two-fold distinction meaningful to you? In what way?
- Do you remember a time when any of this became real to you? What happened?

What is the really big point of all this?

- As children of God (think of what THAT alone means!), we can have peace about eternity and trust God to bring us through this difficult life intact.
- And even more importantly, we are free to be really vulnerable with God about our deepest hopes and wishes.

## Homework

1. Chapters 7 & 8
2. Continue to pray for our sessions, for them to result in understanding and wisdom on our part, that we gradually put to action in our own lives.

# Part six: Finding our identity as part of God's family & combining heart and life in discipleship

(Chapters 7 & 8)

## Goals for Today

1. Understanding the nature of faith.
2. Understanding what it means to be in the family of God.
3. Understand the whole, positive measure of being a disciple and where to get the motivation to be one

Before we get into today's text...let's look at the nature of faith, which is so important to be able to accomplish what we have been talking about all these weeks. A firm understanding of faith is critical for happiness in our lives.

A. W. Tozer, famous writer of the past, writes of faith:

Faith is the least self-regarding of the virtues. It is by its very nature scarcely conscious of its own existence. Like the eye which sees everything in front of it and never sees itself, faith is occupied with the Object upon which it rests and pays no attention to itself at all. While we are looking at God we do not see ourselves—blessed riddance. The man who has struggled to purify himself and has had nothing but repeated failures will experience real relief when he stops tinkering with his soul and looks away to the perfect One. While he looks at Christ the very things he has so long been trying to do will be getting done within him. It will be God working in him to will and to do.

Faith is not in itself a meritorious act; the merit is in the One toward Whom it is directed. Faith is a redirecting of our sight, a getting out of the focus of our own vision and getting God into focus. Sin has twisted our vision inward and made it self-regarding. Unbelief has put self where God should be, and is perilously close to the sin of Lucifer who said, "I will set my throne above the throne of God." Faith looks out instead of in and the whole life falls into line.

A. W. Tozer. *The Pursuit of God* (pp. 50-51). General Press. Kindle Edition.

What is it like for you when you try to have faith? How might you increase your faith?

Moving back to the text...





## The Christian life is like a two-sided coin

One side of the coin is the cross.

The other side is the empty tomb.

Can you explain this in Wesley terms?



The cross to repair our broken relationship with God through pardon.

The empty tomb to share the very life of Christ in persistent growth and holy love.

Wesley emphasized the experiential nature of becoming a Christian, and drew a sharp distinction between believing things about Jesus and God, and believing them to be true for yourself as a member of God's family. In other words, it's one thing to believe that God is merciful, and another to know that you have accepted and experienced God's mercy for yourself.

- ***Have you experienced this distinction? If so, how?***

Wesley was clearly an evangelist. The author speaks of essentially "closing the sales call", or asking for a response from your listener.

- ***How well do you think we do about this as Christians when we speak about our faith? How can it be done in our present culture? What's hard about it?***

Going further, our current chapters have to do with Wesley's beliefs about internal change that happens when one becomes a Christian. He said that one of the ways that we can know we are Christians is from the assurance we have within us that we are children of God. However, this emphasis grew a little less with Wesley as time went on. Our author indicated that Wesley came to see that he had likely caused some harm from this emphasis.

- ***Thinking back, did you experience the assurance Wesley spoke of when you began your Christian journey?***
- ***What do you imagine this harm to be that was mentioned in the book? Have you experienced something some of this harm?***

Wesley also made a distinction between coming to God as a servant and coming to God as one of God's children.

- ***What do you make of this? Is this distinction real?***
- ***Have you ever thought of yourself as an actual child of God?***

On the one hand, it's easy to turn faith into a good work that is exhausting. Similarly, since the Christian life includes good works...

- ***...what can keep them from being exhausting also (in a negative way)?***
- ***What place does faith play in our motivations, directly or indirectly?***
- ***What does it mean to be both a disciple of Jesus and a child of God?***
- ***In one of those conjunctive pairs of viewpoints that can be difficult to merge, Jesus said both that his burden is light and that we should pick up our cross daily and follow him. How do you reconcile these two sayings?***

## Homework

- Read chapter 9
- Continue to pray that you will get from this course what you need.



## Part seven: Christianity is a social faith: we grow best together

(Chapter 9)

### Goals for Today

1. Understand the nature and need for fellowship
2. Learn tips on how to share ourselves in a way that fits us

Being a spiritual family together is central to Christianity. It is discussed and illustrated throughout the Bible. Let's take a look at how the Bible talks about the importance of community. For now we'll take a look at the New Testament..

To set the stage, it is helpful to understand what Wesley meant by a social faith. Today when we talk about a social faith, or social action, we often mean good deeds to help others in need or to give voice to a need for justice in society. Wesley was talking about something different, though he was very active in righting wrongs in society and helping the poor. Wesley talked a lot about being involved with one another, and required those involved in Methodism to be so.

### The primacy of love

Early in the chapter our author writes: "The discovery that the heart of holiness is holy love rather than avoiding sin was huge in my understanding 'plain old scriptural Christianity.'"

- How does this contrast inform your thinking about Christian community? How would a focus on avoiding sin change things?

### How we should relate to one another

Rom. 12:10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

1 Cor. 12:25 ...so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

Gal. 5:13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

James 2:1 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.

Gal. 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Support the weak (1 Thess. 5:14). Be compassionate with one another (Eph. 4:32). Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16). Forgive one another (Col. 3:13).	Accept one another (Rom. 15:7). Pray for each other (James 5:16). Submit to one another (Eph. 5:21). Be kind to each other (1 Thess. 5:15). Bear with each other (Col. 3: 13). Don't slander one another (James 4:11). Don't grumble against each other (James 5:9).
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Wow! That's quite a list. Acts adds to this a good summary of the early social nature of the church:

Acts 2:42–47 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

- Which of the above commands has been an area of successful growth for you since following Christ?
- Which is one of the hardest commands for you at present?

## To love add structure

“In the history of making disciples nothing Wesley did was more strategic than the creation of the societies (large congregation), the class meetings (small congregation), and the bands (intimate congregation).”

- How would you describe your involvement in these different types of groups? How satisfied are you in your current participation?
- Add any comments about how your participation in Christian groups has affected your spiritual and emotional walk.

# Recognize the benefits of being involved with groups

There is need for balance in Christian growth...there is a role for others in expanding our understanding and thinking, as well as the need for them to help reel us in when we go off on an extreme.

In other words, there is safety in numbers in a good group. It's a chance to maintain balance in growth and stay true to the course

In psychology, when a person comes to us awash in crisis, we offer them structure (cognition) to help calm their agitated emotions, "talking them down from the ledge", so to speak. When they come to us hemmed in with constricting beliefs we offer them freedom (more room for to express their true nature) to help provide pressure relief.

"At my ordination service, the speaker spoke of other people as 'sandpaper in the hands of God' to be part of 'finishing' his servants."

Another benefit of groups is to increase your vision for your Christian life through hearing the stories of others and being with other people with similar beliefs.

- Has any of this been a part of your experience?

The personal pronouns in the Lord's Prayer are all plural. People in AA have noted that the 12 steps are all in the plural also.

- Trick question: How was this important in the Civil War?

Our author essentially describes some people as "loner" Christians and considers this a problem. Do you agree?

Like the image of a fire at the top of today's notes, fellowship helps to keep the fires of faith glowing in our lives. A single log tends not to burn well in a fireplace.

## Bonus: Some tips on sharing yourself with others

### 1. *Recognize that we are all different in our needs for connection*

Almost all schools of marital therapy have some system for describing differing needs for intimacy. Essentially, the typical distinction is between people who desire a high level of intimacy, medium level, and a lesser desire for physical and verbal intimacy. It turns out that people with some of the combinations can make a relationship be satisfactory to both parties, but a person with a high level of desire for closeness and one with a significantly less desire (the two ends of the spectrum) will have a hard time finding common ground without significant work...and even then it may not work, depending on the degree of difference in their desires.

In other words, be aware that you may not be happy with some relationships if there is not enough common ground. We can find a degree of relatedness with most people, but have to be aware not to take someone's distance personally. Set your expectations accordingly.

## 2. *Share yourself with “balance”*

It is much easier to share yourself if you share something positive about yourself before you share something negative. It cuts down on the feeling of being overly dramatic or excessively exposed. This is particularly true when speaking to a group or someone who does not know you well or about a topic that makes you feel particularly vulnerable.

“My relationship with my daughter has been really good this year, but my son is not speaking to me, and I am worried about it.”

“I’m praying daily these days, which I’m really glad about, but my eating has gotten out of control.”

In a more intimate small group that has a high level of sharing I might ask, “What happened good in your spiritual life this week that we can thank God for, and what happened that concerns you that we can pray about?”

## 3. *Share—check—share*

When getting to know someone you may need to get a feel for the level of sharing they are comfortable with.

Share: put something out there that is just a bit vulnerable, but not so much that you feel too exposed. This can be with an individual or a group.

Check: Watch for the response and see if they share something back with you. Most people will appreciate that you have shared yourself and will try to share what they can back to “keep the vulnerability ground” a bit level. In a sense you’re fishing around for compatibility. If you progressively continue to share yourself with increased vulnerability, you may get to a level where reciprocation lessens. This is your indication not to go further and expect mutuality though it might change with time. This is not an exact process...but the best relationships have a mutuality about them that works.

Share: Continue to share at a level where you feel safe and the other person does too. This may limit some relationships...but the limitation is there organically, and there may not be anything you can do about it.



## How to Make Use of Groups

Fundamentally, a group is a kind of workshop, an interpersonal “laboratory” which functions as a miniature community. In this setting we work to interact both freely and openly with ourselves and others, permitting an exploration of aspects of living we all share.

You might look at your group experience as an opportunity to work on any of the following goals:

I want to communicate better with people.

I want to try to assert myself, to say “No,” and not to feel overpowered by others.

I want to be able to trust others, I have been hurt so often in the past.

I want some feedback about how I come across to others.  
I want to be able to express my feelings and not hold everything inside.

Acknowledge to yourself when you're being defensive. Notice the price you pay when you are that way, as well as the other side of the coin, when being protective is helpful.

- Respond verbally to what is going on even if you are not sure your contribution is “worthwhile.”
- If you feel no immediate identification with the issue under discussion, search yourself for what you **are** feeling.
- Look at what you do with your “energy” as a person. Do you hold yourself in and try to “freeze” yourself, or act out your energy immediately in order to get rid of it? Try to learn how you experience and express your energy physically.
- Spread yourself around and be interested in other members. Members who initially seem least compatible, and even abrasive, may eventually offer the most productive and enlightening encounters.
- Learn to listen...to others and to yourself. Listen for the content of what is said, the feelings behind the content, and the effect on yourself and others. Also, notice the behavior and tone of voice when someone speaks.
- Practice sharing your feelings...in the here and now. Develop a feelings vocabulary and learn to use “I” statements rather than “you” statements. (i.e., “When you said that, **I became upset.**” Not, “**You made me upset.**”)
- Learn how to give feedback to others. Try to offer comments in response to theirs when appropriate.

## Things to Avoid in Group

- Clobbering others over the head with your feelings instead of owning them and expressing them appropriately. This is especially true of judgmental feelings, which have no place in group.
- Trying to deal with others' feelings instead of your own. Address your own feelings first, then you will see more clearly how to offer feedback to others.
- Worrying about “doing it just right” or being afraid to speak up. It's not worth it, and you will have a dull group.

## Homework

1. Read chapter 10
2. Continue to pray that you will get from this course the results you need

# Part eight: Going on to perfection

## (Chapter 10)

### Goals for Today

1. Understand Wesley's take on perfection
2. How not to make yourself crazy trying to be perfect...but still caring about your walk

Wesley's thoughts on entire sanctification or perfection are a bit complicated. In some ways it seems like he took two thoughts—the positive effect of a new birth in Romans 6 and the dilemma of ongoing sin talked about in Romans 7—and tried to make them into one thought. I think the answer came across somewhat theoretical, which has been confusing for many, and has not stayed prominent through the years in what one hears from Methodist pulpits. In some ways, however, this might be a classic case calling for conjunctive theology...two thoughts that seem to contradict but can both be embraced.

Romans 6:1-4

*What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! **How can we who died to sin go on living in it?** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

Romans 7: 14-20

*For we know that the law is spiritual; but **I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin.** I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

So, on the one hand we can't just go on living in sin, though we will nevertheless do that some.

Perhaps one of the best passages of scripture that contains a balance that we can pursue in our lives is found in I John. You'll recognize some of Wesley's thought in it.



## I John 1 & 2 (NRSV)

### **The Word of Life**

*We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

### **God Is Light**

*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

*Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says, “I have come to know him,” but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, “I abide in him,” ought to walk just as he walked.*

### **A New Commandment**

*Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says, “I am in the light,” while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates another believer[e] is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.*

Our task is not so much to worry about detailed theology (though being firmly grounded in the foundational truths of Christianity is important), but to walk in the light in fellowship with God, the Holy Spirit and Jesus.

Do not try to earn forgiveness anymore than you would try to earn a birthday present, but accept it gratefully.

And do not try to pump yourself up to do good deeds, but rather let yourself be empowered by the relationship you have with God and Jesus who love you, feeding off of the Word, fellowship with Christians, and the provision of good thoughts, motivations, and abilities in your life by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore pray, read the Word, be involved with **congregational, class, and small group meetings**, and join with others in doing good deeds to those in need...offering both practical and spiritual help.

And you will grow.

## Schedule

Week 1: Intro and Chap 1

Week 2: Chap 2, the Bible

Week 3: Chap 3, discipleship and the Holy Spirit

Week 4: Chap 4 & 5, prevenient grace and repentance

Week 5: Chap 6, justification

Week 6: Chap 7 & 8, sanctification and holy love

Week 7: Chap 9, social faith

Week 8: Chap 10, entire sanctification

Wesley was a cross between you mom and dad and your boot camp drill sergeant