

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 is the starting point of God’s prevenient grace. 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.

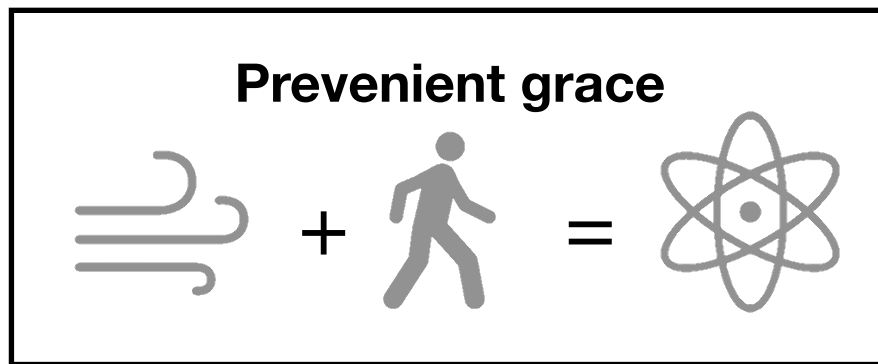
Role of Effort

On our own

All on our own



= not much



Prevenient = preceding in time or order; antecedent.

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 motivation or willingness, pray for it. Good advice.
- It's like you're a farmer...you know that no crops grow without rain, so you pray for rain, especially if you're in a drought!
- 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.



**Conjunctive
theology**

Faith/works

- 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.

Faith IN God

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.
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit grows within us as we grow in faith and trust (sometimes precariously phrased as “yielding” to 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

Discipleship
and Spirit

Ministry of
Holy Spirit

progressive as our faith grows , and we allow the Spirit more room in our lives to act. When we follow the light we can have, 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.
 - God wants us to remember what he wishes Adam and Eve had instinctively known, but didn’t: that we don’t have to hide our true selves from him, because he’s not after perfection but intimacy. God’s not waiting for some perfect version of us; he’s’s not disgusted by those parts of us that we’d rather keep clothed. Instead, God simply longs for us to trust him enough to expose ourselves to him transparently so that he can show us that he loves us completely— and can help us.

Spiritual breathing

On exhaling

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 do 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
mekness	humility
executing the play	winning the game
dryness	sobriety

The “zone”

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

One last word about discipleship:
We are made to serve



We should care for ourselves, which is important (one side of the coin)



...but we are happiest when we also serve, using the gifts we have been given and the motivation provided by God (the other side of the coin)

Last word

Keeping a balance between the two is the best possible world.

Homework

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

Homework