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# Holiness of heart and life for the 21st-century church

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GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

HOLINESS OF HEART AND LIFE FOR THE 21ST-CENTURY CHURCH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY  
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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This work is dedicated to all who have supported and believed in me as I vision for the future. Especially to my daughter, Shannon Elizabeth, and to my son, Seth Daniel.

Thanks for all of your love.

To my grandson Sean Daniel, may you dance with the Holy throughout your life. Also to my friends who poured over countless manuscripts and essays to help me write from my heart and not only my head.

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## PREFACE

In June of 2009, United Methodist Bishop Larry Goodpaster placed his hands on my shoulders and pronounced that I should take authority going into the world and community, to be a part of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, so that “every knee shall bow” and understand God’s grace and love for them. As an Ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church, I accepted this calling without reservation. After all, I had been a practicing minister (licensed local pastor) since the year 2000.

During these nine years of ministry I served mostly small, rural churches. These churches were full of faithful people, most of who had been reared in the church since birth. The communities surrounding these churches struggled due to the lack of industry and other employment opportunities, as well as an aging population. I felt called to teach them that as God’s children, they were also called by God to go into the world (or community) and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. As they did this, others would covet the grace and love that they saw lived out in their neighbors. As they began to understand and feel God’s love and grace, God would begin to transform their lives. Seems pretty straight forward, doesn’t it?

What I discovered within these churches was a people who seemed to be missing something. While nurturing one another within the church was their strength, they seemed frightened to share their faith story outside of church walls. I discovered this was based on a belief that others might deem them “fanatics” or accuse them of “shoving their faith down someone’s throat.” For the people of this church, following Jesus was about keeping certain rules and regulations, such as: not drinking, not swearing, or not committing murder. Keeping the “rules” was what it meant to be a disciple and to train

others to be disciples (i.e., I'll keep the rules and teach you how to keep the rules too). Spiritual formation also focused on adhering to a set of rules (i.e., if I keep the rules, which will please God, I'll grow closer to God). Theirs was more of an individual faith that did not include an understanding of discipleship as a communal practice of aiding others to grow (i.e., to mature, to continue to be transformed by God, and to move forward in faith) in God's grace and love. Somehow, they had missed the point that grace is given as a gift by faith alone and that following certain "rules" doesn't make God love us more or less. It was if they did not understand that following Jesus involved living out their faith within community, holding one another accountable, encouraging and serving others, building relationships with people from all walks and stations of life, and walking with God throughout each day as they captured the full essence of life in the world.

While serving these rural churches, my calling centered around helping the church community experience the power of the risen Christ that would enable them to grow spiritually in their relationship with Christ; to be a follower, not because they had to be but because they truly wanted to be; and to incarnate Jesus every day as they went about daily tasks. They had become so accustomed to the pastor "doing the ministry" and simply "receiving the benefits" of the pastor's efforts that many had forgotten how to be the church. They had forgotten how to nurture their spiritual lives and disciple others in the faith; thusly, they appeared complacent and often disconnected from God. For some reason, everyone, including the clergy, had stopped expecting the people of the church to grow spiritually or to help others grow in faith. The lack of expectation, lack of a vision for the future, and the lack of a holistic living faith added to the disconnect that we all felt. The Wesleyan practices that led to "holiness of heart and life" were neglected. It was



no longer understood that holiness of heart and life meant a grace-filled, powerfully equipped, life changing, continuing journey with the God who loves them unconditionally. Perhaps following a set of beliefs or rules was easier than engaging in a deep relationship with the God of creation.

Many religious groups, not only the United Methodists, have replaced these core practices associated with the journey toward “holiness of heart and life” with programs or events promoting fellowship or “reaching” people in order to bring them into a particular building. If this were working, perhaps we would be seeing an increase in church attendance and membership, but the opposite is true. Church attendance and membership among the mainline denominations continues to nosedive. It is evident that churches are in need of change. What would it look like if in following Jesus the church truly disciplined itself to intentionally include practices such as private and public prayer, studying scripture, visiting the imprisoned, caring for the sick, feeding the poor, and expressing the love of neighbor in community, in addition to corporate worship and participating in the sacraments? Wesley believed that these disciplines would lead to a deep and abiding relationship with God and lead toward “holiness of heart and life” (a grace-filled, powerfully equipped, life-changing, continuing journey with the God who loves all).

It is my hope that this work will enlighten readers to explore and to re-imagine how to be faithful disciples who are excited and eager to share the good news of Jesus Christ. I hope that readers will boldly and humbly engage on a journey of deeper spiritual commitment as a disciple of Jesus Christ. I believe that John Wesley’s practices of holiness of heart and life can be re-formed and re-established in ways that will make

sense to postmodern believers so that all can begin to more fully live their faith in the world.

## ABSTRACT

The Methodist movement has for centuries claimed an evangelicalism concentrated on forming disciples that were active in the world in practical ways and became spiritually mature as they followed Jesus Christ. I claim that the Methodists have lost this concentration, but by looking with new vision into John Wesley's formative practices of discipleship and spiritual formation (i.e., holiness of heart and life), we can re-imagine what it means to continue to grow as spiritually mature and active disciples in the world.

In Section One, I will engage the reader with the real-life struggles of a rural church in the areas of spiritual formation and discipleship. I will unpack John Wesley's formative practices within the early Methodist movement so that readers can glean an understanding of what set it apart from other religious expressions of that time period. Section Two will uncover solutions for engaging believers in discipleship and spiritual formation that have been proposed within the past 15 years. In Section Three, who the "postmodern" person is and what they believe/don't believe about religion will be defined. Discussion will involve why Methodist believers strayed away from engaging in the Wesleyan practices of spiritual formation that seemed to propel the initial Methodist movement. I will demonstrate that Wesley's practices in discipleship and spiritual formation fostered communion with the Triune God in Christian community, equipped believers to follow Jesus into the world as they were transformed by God's love and grace working in their lives, and enabled them to live Christ-centered, incarnational lives. Section Four will describe the dissertation artifact. I have chosen a book format because of its accessibility to nearly all Americans, including clergy and laity, who are interested

in the future of the church, in particular the United Methodist denomination. Section Five includes the Artifact Specification. Section Six includes a Postscript that suggests further research possibilities.

SECTION ONE:  
THE SEPARATION OF HEART AND LIFE

*I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.*

—John Wesley<sup>1</sup>

**The Story**

I have discovered that I like watching the show “The X Factor.” While it is a show about a singing competition that draws all ages and types of singers onto the stage, it is also about finding the talent that has “The X Factor”—something that makes them stand out from the crowd of other singers in the world. What is that “X Factor?” Well, no one can really define “IT,” but when someone has “IT,” everyone will just know. Many churches today are trying to find their “X Factor.” They vamp up worship so it becomes an entertaining presentation in order to attract people or they boast more programs than the church down the street. The truth is, the church already has its “X Factor”—Jesus! Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow and his message of grace and love continue to be exciting and relevant to the world. Jesus Christ is both the old and the new cornerstone of the church. Why then are churches, who have the most impressive “X Factor” in the world, in decline?

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<sup>1</sup> Rupert E. Davies, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9: The Methodist Societies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 527.

People across the United States appear tired of the binary opposites that plague our world and our religion today (i.e., in/out, left/right, conservative/liberal, saved/not saved). They have seen both religious and secular institutions fail and fall hard. And yet, as disillusioned as folks seem to be with “the way it’s always been done,” many also appear to be searching for the meaning of life as they live in a pluralistic world afflicted with violence, terrorism, uncertainty, and fear.<sup>2</sup> Marcus Borg, in chapter one of *The Emerging Christian Way*, believes that the culture of the current church, what he calls “The Belief-Centered Paradigm,” must change in order for the disillusioned to once again embrace Christianity.<sup>3</sup> He advocates instead for a “Transformation-Centered Paradigm.” This paradigm recognizes that the Christian life is not a set of beliefs, but is a relationship with God, as known to us in Jesus; a relationship that transforms us as we journey with him and are enthusiastically involved in God’s world.<sup>4</sup> Stanley Hauerwas proclaims, “We are a ‘storied’ people because the God that sustains us is a ‘storied’ God.”<sup>5</sup> Christians are a people who have been formed by story, one that comes with the both the means and the thrust needed to negotiate this flawed existence, as we trust in God’s promise of redemption.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps as the Church begins to truly honor and live God’s story and not just follow a set of beliefs or rules, not only will people grow spiritually, but the

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<sup>2</sup> Edward H. Hammett and James R. Pierce, *Reaching People under 40 While Keeping People over 60: Being Church for All Generations* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), xii.

<sup>3</sup> Marcus Borg, *The Emerging Way: Thoughts, Stories, and Wisdom for a Faith of Transformation*, Michael Schwartztruber, ed. (British Columbia: Copperhouse, 2006), 12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 91.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Kingdom of God will increase as God's children are engaged with and strengthened by imaginative retellings of God's story.

Romans 8:14-16 (CEB) states: "All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons and daughters. You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children. With this Spirit, we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The same Spirit agrees with our spirit, that we are God's children."<sup>7</sup> As God's children, we are invited to develop an intimate relationship, a deep connection to the God of all creation through Jesus, the resurrected Son. This relationship expands and flourishes as we journey together—with God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and with one another. All who follow Jesus are summoned to this adventure where a relationship with God through Christ is established and advanced and as we grow closer to God, are disciples of the risen Christ, and put others before ourselves. Our spirits yearn for this closeness, and yet we often do not take responsibility for our part in its development. While God loves us as we are and has given us the free will to choose whether or not we will participate in the relationship, when we turn from God, we miss out on the joy and true happiness that comes from this intimate, contiguous relationship with God. We miss out on being transformed into the person that God created us to be. We miss out on our own spiritual growth and formation.

All who enter into this journey are called to be disciples. "In first-century Palestine, the word *disciple* didn't mean what it means today. It did not refer to a pupil in school who learned from notebook to notebook via a credentialed teacher. Rather, it meant apprentice. A disciple was someone who learned a skill or way of life from a

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<sup>7</sup> *Common English Bible*, (Nashville, 2011).

teacher. With respect to Jesus, a disciple was a *follower*—not just of a set of teachings but of an entire way of living.”<sup>8</sup> Jesus followers, disciples, are invited to not only learn an entire way of living, but to join him in the world as others are introduced and invited to live in this “way.” As we join Jesus’ whirling life force, as we follow him along the “way,” a company of new followers will join in, close relationships will be formed, and followers will be invested in each other’s lives as they become aligned with Christ and at one with God.<sup>9</sup> Being a disciple runs parallel to our close relationship with God. In other words, we were not meant to be alone on the journey. As we participate with other followers, as we become “one body” in Christ Jesus; as our story becomes Jesus’ story, we become disciples “baptized in the Spirit with the grace of his resurrection life.”<sup>10</sup> It is as disciples, as followers, that we begin to understand that our story *is* God’s story and that God’s story *is* our story. It is as we journey with Father, Son, and Spirit that our lives are transformed in such a way that we cannot contain the story any longer. So we begin to live differently, act differently, think differently, and so on, as the God of all creation continues to do resurrection work within us. As we grow and change, others will want to know what is going on in our lives. It is now that we have an opportunity to “make disciples”—as we share God’s story and our story, as we demonstrate what a disciple is, and as we mentor and show them how to be a follower of Jesus.

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<sup>8</sup> Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus: A Theography* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 130.

<sup>9</sup> Leonard Sweet, *I Am A Follower: The Way, The Truth, and Life of Following Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), Kindle Location 361.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle Location 368.



Disciples have a responsibility to allow God to work in their lives, to join Jesus in the world, and to draw closer to God and to one another. When these primary spiritual formation habits cease, the Body of Christ becomes disjointed and being disciples (let alone making disciples) becomes difficult. Jerry Bridges gives a good analogy:

A farmer plows his field, sows the seed, and fertilizes and cultivates—all the while knowing that in the final analysis he is utterly dependent on forces outside of himself. He knows he cannot cause the seed to germinate, nor can he produce the rain and sunshine for growing and harvesting the crop. For a successful harvest, he is dependent on these things from God.

*Yet, the farmer knows that unless he diligently pursues his responsibilities to plow, plant, fertilize, and cultivate, he cannot expect a harvest at the end of the season. In a sense he is in a partnership with God, and he will reap its benefits only when he has fulfilled his own responsibilities [emphasis mine].*<sup>11</sup>

Being a disciple is like being in a relationship. It is a joint venture with the Other and requires our participation and responsibility. We cannot do what God must do, and God will not do what we should do.<sup>12</sup> Each follower of Jesus has responsibility for their own *discipleship*, their own *spiritual formation*, as these things do not happen magically just because we love God or follow certain rules. God will graciously provide all that we need for this growth and transformation. As we begin to draw closer to God in one area of life, God will reveal another area that may need work. Both discipleship and spiritual formation (which can be used interchangeably here) are a process, a journey, an adventure that allows us to pursue holiness of heart and life as we draw closer to God and to one another.

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<sup>11</sup> Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1978), 13.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Hill Valley United Methodist Church (UMC)<sup>13</sup> is located in a rural farming community. Career opportunities have become increasingly difficult here and many families have moved from the area. The congregation is made up of people who have worshiped in this church for generations. It is not uncommon to hear stories of “the good old days” when attendance neared 300 each Sunday; when people drove horses and buggies just to come to church; when camp meetings were held each summer and hundreds were “saved.” Now they are blessed to have 15 regular attendees, most over 60 years old. The church building, built in the 1800s, has no running water nor on-site bathroom facilities. The congregation seems to be in a “Let’s just exist” mode. They are, however, a very loving people who seem to be great at nurturing one another. If someone is sick within the church family or community, they are the first to take meals to them. If there is a death, again food, but more importantly they are there as a quiet presence. Everyone knows everyone else in this small Southern community and neighbors generally help neighbors when the need arises. Their compassion for the physical needs of those they know and love is outstanding. They love their neighbor, but it seems to be an act of friendship, duty, tradition, or common decency, as they do not seem to be connecting these loving actions with their faith development. It is as if they are unaware that God’s story *is* their story and they are not connecting this ability to lovingly nurture others as a part of their own faith and spiritual development. While there may be a cognitive understanding of God, there does not appear to be a deeper understanding of

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<sup>13</sup> The name of this church is fictional but describes many churches I have known and served during my time in ministry.

God's presence in *their* daily lives. God then becomes someone "kept" within the walls of the church building and never really becomes a relational part of their lives.

God's story is about transformation of life. Many of those who attend the church appear satisfied with the one hour per week of "spiritual development" that they believe is achieved during the worship service. While they are demonstrating the ability to take care of one another, there seems to be so much more that is missing from their lives. Worship becomes duty instead of joy. Bible study with others becomes just one more thing to schedule in an already full life. Visiting the sick...well, isn't that the pastor's job? There is little expectation of change, transformation, or maturing in one's relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This is not only among the church-goers, but among clergy as well. The church people say they want to grow in numbers (more people in the pews), but hardly mention spiritual growth. It is as if they are afraid of where God may lead them if they truly begin to travel the road of a disciple.

A friend shared this analogy with me recently and it is a good description of this congregation as well as many others in existence today. If someone were to ask the congregation of a church to go out hand in hand and surround the building, which way would they stand? Would they face toward the church building, or away from it? Most would probably face toward the building, but the reality is that as called disciples of Jesus Christ, we must face away from the building and into the community and world in which we have been placed. This "facing away" has nothing to do with our creeds or the rules we must/must not follow. Instead it has everything to do with a relationship with God in Jesus Christ, a relationship fostered by a deeper spiritual commitment to journey daily with Christ as his disciple, a relationship sustained by aiding others as they journey with

Christ, and a relationship strengthened as we lovingly support, encourage, and hold one another accountable as we journey together with God in different ways. While Hill Valley exhibited a wonderful understanding of presence and nurture, there seemed to be a missing vital link between what they were doing and their understanding of a daily *relationship* with God. They appeared to know who God was and possibly that God loved them and called them to love, but this love seemed to only be lived out among friends and family. Nor did they appear to understand the importance of the community of believers where true discipleship is formed in the unique context of concerns, needs, gifts, and opportunities within that community.<sup>14</sup> The congregation rarely took responsibility for the processes through which they regularly engaged others in learning to love God and serve God's people, leaving that to the paid minister. There was little cohesive rhythm between their daily lives and their life in a relationship with the risen Christ. There was no vision or dream of where God would lead them and little expectation for their life-long learning and growing in their faith. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, understood discipleship and spiritual formation both as a significant part of the journey with God as one surrenders to following Jesus each day. Personal and corporate growth in these areas aids one in developing a deep and abiding relationship with God through Jesus and with others. This journey or process is what Wesley termed as the pursuit of "holiness of heart and life." I wonder where the understanding of Wesley's ideas of "holiness of heart and life" was misinterpreted or began to be less

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<sup>14</sup> Carol F. Krau. *Keeping in Touch: Christian Formation and Teaching* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1999), 21.

recognized within Methodism (and within the church universal) as concrete practices toward a relational, transformational life with others and with God.

### **A Brief History of Methodism**

John Wesley never intended to form a new church. Wesley, the son of an Anglican rector, understood his first desire to be the reformation of the church in which he was reared: the Church of England. Wesley believed in a well-ordered and well-disciplined life, as well as the need to be wholly subordinate to God.<sup>15</sup> In 1728, he was ordained an elder in the Church of England, serving only a very short time in parish ministry before returning to teach at Oxford.<sup>16</sup> Once back at Oxford, he and his brother Charles formed a group that was committed to the study of scripture, partaking of the sacraments (Holy Communion and Baptism), attending worship, honoring the fast days of the ancient church, visiting those in prison, and helping the poor. As he also focused on sermon writing and preaching, he quickly became a popular preacher in several churches in and around Oxford. He, however, began to struggle with his faith and the state of his soul, and so he accepted a trip to Savannah, Georgia with a missionary expedition in 1734, thinking that he may get the answers that he sought by participating in a new ministry in a new place. Wesley's time spent as a missionary was considered a failure. He did not overcome his doubts and fears about his faith and his attempt to impose order and discipline to religion in the new world did not go over well.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Jason Vickers, *Wesley: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Upon returning to London, Wesley became friends with a Moravian minister named Peter Bohler. Wesley had decided that he did have faith but that his faith was not strong enough to conquer his fear of death. Bohler disagreed with him telling him that he either had complete faith or none at all.<sup>18</sup> Now thoroughly discouraged, Wesley decided that he would stop preaching. Bohler's advice to him was to "preach faith until you have it, and because you have it you will preach faith."<sup>19</sup> As Wesley began to preach with zeal in both churches and prisons, he continued to struggle with his own faith. His brother, Charles, had experienced a profound witness of the Holy Spirit in which he was assured of his own salvation and this discouraged John even more; until one evening when he unwillingly attended a religious society meeting at Aldersgate Street. It was then, upon hearing a reading of the Epistle to the Romans, he felt his heart "strangely warmed" and knew then that he did indeed trust in Christ alone for his salvation, and that his sins had been removed, thus saving him from the law of sin and of death.<sup>20</sup> This experience, as well as instructions from the Moravians that a noticeable increase in the fruits of the spirit would follow, changed the course of Wesley's life.<sup>21</sup>

John Wesley continued to remain deeply committed to the Church of England, particularly to participating in the "means of grace" that he considered essential for a life

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 14, as taken from John Wesley, 4 March 1738, *Journal and Diaries I (1735-1738)*, W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., vol. 18 of the *Bicentennial of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), 228.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 15.

of salvation. These “means,” which Wesley believed that the Church offered, were not ends in themselves but a part of the journey toward a complete faith in God through Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup> Participation in these “means” allowed for continued strengthening and understanding of God’s unlimited grace and love.<sup>23</sup> For Wesley, being a Christian was now no longer centered in belonging to the institution of the church, but in the practice of the “means of grace” that allowed one to experience God’s presence daily in their lives. Wesley said, “By ‘means of grace’ I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained by God...to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men...grace.”<sup>24</sup> This included:

- prayer, whether in secret or in the congregation;
- searching the scriptures, not as in Bible study or sermon preparation, but as meditation and focus;
- partaking regularly upon the Lord’s Supper;
- engaging in “Holy Conversation,” that is with others of similar mind so the journey of the soul can be shared;
- fasting, from food or other things that take focus from God; and
- public worship, in that the church is God’s mission to the world, not an end in itself.<sup>25</sup>

Wesley believed that by using these “means,” we grow in God’s grace and thus, grow closer to God. He was quick to point out, however, that no amount of self-discipline or works would make one holy.<sup>26</sup> Individuals alone can be redeemed, but it is a part of our

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<sup>22</sup> Donald W. Haynes, *On The Threshold of Grace: Methodist Fundamentals* (Dallas: UMR Communications, 2010), 73.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-86.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

salvation to do our duty while on this earth (John 9:4).<sup>27</sup> Wesley's insistence on holiness of not only heart, but also of life, meant that as believers journey with God, they come to understand and conform to God's will, achieve the "mind of Christ" through the "means of grace," and live out their personal holiness through social holiness.<sup>28</sup>

This journey with God was what Wesley called the "*via salutis*" or "Way of Salvation."<sup>29</sup> This "Way" was a spiritual pilgrimage made possible by the gift of God's grace given along the journey and accepted by the believer through faith, made complete in love of God and neighbor.<sup>30</sup> The essential foundation of salvation for Wesley lay in the character of God, which is love.<sup>31</sup> This was different from other thoughts of his day that insisted that the foundation of salvation was the depravity of the sinner, their repentance, and the inability of the believer to ever resist God's love and grace. Although Wesley believed that all are indeed sinners estranged from God, he taught that humanity hears the whispers of God's Spirit calling them to a relationship of love. God's love, like a parental love, is self-limiting. This allows for our "human liberty" (free-will) and also for humanity to resist or turn from God's grace. While God's grace calls to all, faith is the response if we so choose.<sup>32</sup> Wesley used the metaphor of a porch on a house to explain this theology: when we stand upon the porch, but do not yet enter into the house, we experience God's grace that is asking us, wooing us, and calling us to let God into all of

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<sup>27</sup> Mack B Stokes, *Major United Methodist Beliefs* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 24.

<sup>28</sup> Haynes, 68-71.

<sup>29</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 178.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Haynes, 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.



our lives (the house). We then may choose to go to the front door and stand at the threshold with the God of love. This is our awareness that God loves us and that God will remove the guilt, will remove our sin, and will lead us into a new life. If we then enter into the house, accepting Jesus Christ as our savior, repenting of our sin, and earnestly seeking a new life, God then asks if God can go into the rooms. Each room is an unlocking of the stuff of life – things that might be painful for us, things that God’s love and grace will help us deal with. As we journey through the rooms, we seek God’s will in every room of the house (our lives) and begin to grow, both in holiness of heart and life. Wesley called this “grace upon grace” being poured into our lives.<sup>33</sup>

Revival swept through England. While not breaking church law, but instead believing that the church would, as it had in the past, benefit from creativity and innovation,<sup>34</sup> Wesley pushed the bounds of what was considered acceptable conduct for respectable clergy. He began preaching in the fields, in coal mines, in the market places, and even in graveyards atop tombstones.<sup>35</sup> Crowd sizes often reached into the thousands and Wesley encouraged his followers to join one another in small ‘bands’ of five or six people for weekly confession and prayer. He also put into place structures and practices that allowed the people to help the poor. Soon, there were so many societies growing that there were not enough preachers to go around. This developed Wesley’s practice of authorizing laypersons to go and provide leadership in the absence of an ordained elder. Again, this did not break any church law, but did stretch the bounds of the acceptable

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 10, and from class notes with Dr. Haynes.

<sup>34</sup> Vickers, 17-21.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 17.

responsibilities of laypersons in ministry.<sup>36</sup> The societies, which started as small groups of people gathering to grow in faith, continued to grow out of meeting in individual homes into meetings held in public buildings. The percentage of those from poor or working class families also began to increase within the societies and Wesley persisted in teaching that the well-to-do must care for the poor among them. He strongly believed in building relationships among all people as well as connecting people to God.<sup>37</sup> He worked hard to train the preachers and leaders of the societies and by 1746, the growth was such that Wesley began to organize the societies into circuits, assigning a preacher/leader to a monthly rotation so that each would have the benefit of regular preaching.<sup>38</sup>

As Wesley aged, he began to make provisions for the continuation of Methodism after his death while he continued to focus on the revival in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland. America, too, was experiencing revival after their fight for independence from England had been won. After the war, many in America did not want to be baptized or receive the sacraments by those from the Church of England. This led Wesley to surmise that many Methodists in America would, in effect, no longer be able to depend on the Church of England for the “means of grace.” This was of great concern to Wesley and so, against the advice of his peers, he took it upon himself to ordain Thomas Coke as superintendent (another translation of the Greek word for ‘bishop’), as well as others to assume duties as the deacons and elders of the church. He then sent them on to America

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 22.

to start a new church, separate from the Church of England. The backlash was immediate after the ordinations, but Wesley continued to proclaim that he was only ordaining ministers to work in places where the Church of England was not the established church.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout the revival, Wesley established practices that would link societies together: common goals toward which they were able to work with one another. Societies were responsible for receiving instruction from the preachers and then watching over one another in love, building one another up, and bearing each other's burdens.<sup>40</sup> They were also expected to care for others, especially orphans, widows, and the poor. In December of 1746, Wesley opened up a medical dispensary in London, the goal of which was to help those with chronic illness but to send all difficult cases to physicians.<sup>41</sup> He also opened "The Poorhouse," a place of warm and clean accommodations for widows. In addition, he hired teachers to teach the children who roamed the streets because their parents could not afford to send them to school.<sup>42</sup> By the end of 1748, the school served sixty children and was managed by members of the societies.<sup>43</sup>

The theology and practice of John Wesley's Methodist movement is tremendously missional in nature. Wesley started with a theology of God's love for all. The societies that were formed during the renewal movement of the Church of England understood

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 25-30.

<sup>40</sup> Heitzenrater, 165.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 166-167.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 168.

their role to be to love God and others. They also understood that their holiness, growing in God's grace and becoming conformed to the "mind of Christ," was to be lived out in community and in caring for those in need, while lovingly holding one another accountable for "bearing fruit." The word 'accountable' is often associated with negative sounding words such as, bound, chargeable, compelled, constrained, liable, obligated, and to blame. These synonyms do not adequately define the type of accountability sought after in Wesley's thinking. No, Wesley believed that believers were to "watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation"<sup>44</sup> as they trusted one another with the things in life that tempted them, the temptations they succumbed to, and accepted the love, forgiveness, and encouragement of their sisters and brothers in Christ. Wesley believed that when people worked together to keep each other accountable in this positive way, the world would be a better place: a place where God's love lived in the hearts of all humankind with the byproduct being healthy, spiritually growing communities of compassion and caring for all of God's creation. Because the movement grew so rapidly, believers were only able to gain from valuable preaching monthly (or at times even less) and yet together, they were committed to living a life of holiness and grace within their communities, caring for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the prisoner. They appeared to understand that God had sent them into the world to proclaim God's love to all, and that to do that, they needed one another.

For Wesley, salvation is not as much about a set of beliefs which one piously holds to, but rather a walk or journey with God throughout life; a journey in which God

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<sup>44</sup> D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meetings: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 84.

pours out “grace upon grace” as Christians grow closer to God through a relationship with the Son, Jesus Christ.<sup>45</sup> This relationship, and accepting the grace that comes with it, is what Wesley believed would transform lives. In no way does this mean that the basic tenets of Christianity are lessened or watered down. Wesley believed that one must love God before one can be holy; that one cannot love God before they know that God loves them; and that one cannot know God’s love until God’s Spirit bears witness with our spirit.<sup>46</sup> He also believed that God’s love is a seeking love, seeking humanity to enter into a restored relationship made possible by Jesus Christ. Wesley paired John 3:16 and 1 John 4:19 as primary to his belief. “God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son... We love because he first loved us.”<sup>47</sup> This relationship, therefore, based on love between God through Jesus Christ for and with humankind, is the simple foundation of Wesley’s teachings, as well as that of the Christian faith.

Wesley’s belief in holiness of heart and life began first with faith and then repentance—not the other way around as was popular during his lifetime. A believer becomes holy as they journey with God—as they allow God’s grace to take over their lives. Wesley taught that this holiness would be evidenced in both inward and outward signs. The inward signs were joy, peace, love, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and patience as well as the assurance that sin was forgiven. The outward signs would be seen

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<sup>45</sup> Haynes, 78.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 30.

in living a life of Christlikeness, in respecting and serving those not like them, and in how they cared for the earth, their bodies, and for others. Wesley believed that the church was the vessel that offered the “means of grace”—spiritual disciplines that enabled the believer to draw even more closely to God. These means of grace were experience-based, involved participation, and connected people one to another.<sup>48</sup> For the early Methodist, these “means” kept them drawing closer to God through Jesus Christ and enabled them to experience their faith, to participate in it fully, and to join together with other believers as they lived a life transformed as the hands and feet of Jesus within their communities. Their faith was not only of heart (personal, for themselves) but also of life (communal, to be shared with others). While Wesley seemed to have many “rules” in place for his societies, classes, and bands, his primary focus was not on keeping the rules, but on helping people develop a lifelong relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

### **The Story Continued**

Hill Valley UMC exhibited few of the practices of early Methodism. Most did attend worship weekly and participate in the sacrament of Communion monthly, at least. During the weekly worship, they bowed their heads to “allow” the preacher to pray with and for them and they “allowed” the preacher to read and explain the scriptures. There was very little “participating” in the “means of grace,” rather there was more “assimilating” information. After spending two years with this congregation, I observed

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<sup>48</sup> Means of Grace included: praying; individually and as a body/congregation; meditating and focusing on the scriptures daily; communing at the Lord’s Supper regularly; engaging in Holy Conversations with others who are willing to share the journey with you; fasting; and public worship with the community.

that few within the church incorporated Wesley's formative practices of discipleship and spiritual formation into their daily lives. They did, however, appear to live out the compassion of Christ with those within their small community who were in need. But something was missing. There was no excitement or joy evident in many of their lives and they seemed to have little hope for the future. It was as if they knew *about* God but did not have a relationship *with* God. Because of this, they were not able to grasp that growing spiritually was a never-ending part of the transformational relationship with God, as known in Jesus, and with others. It was as if fear of the unknown, complacency, and comfort were ruling their lives rather than allowing God's love and grace to lead and enable them to be transformed in all aspects of life. In fact, many of the people stated that they felt unworthy, as well as afraid, to fully answer God's call to journey with God every day of their lives. There was little expectation of them individually or communally, and no accountability in love that would assist them in growing closer to God and to one another. They were not being transformed to "holiness of heart and life." Instead, the church members appeared to have lost focus on what they, as the body of Christ, were being called to do with and for one another, in community, and in the world. Not only did it seem as if they had lost their zeal for these formative practices that had once introduced thousands of people to the love and grace of Jesus Christ, but they seemed to also be missing the joy of that love and grace in their immediate lives. As their faith was something only addressed on Sunday, they did not appear to understand that spiritual formation and discipleship are connected to and intertwined with every aspect of life.

The congregation members were not the only persons who had lost focus. The denominational leadership (and that includes me) had essentially stopped expecting and

encouraging the churches to grow as disciples and make more disciples. The daily tasks of running and promoting the existence of the institution became the primary focus rather than assisting the community in forming mature spiritual disciples of Christ. Faith formation was deemed an individual task rather than the activity of the community of believers. Growing in faith seemed to be a lonely, individualistic duty that created a body of people who attended church for what they could get out of it. Churches across the country quickly became entertainment zones with programs designed to “reach” people, to get them in the doors as they competed with the church down the road. Somehow along the way, United Methodist believers across the United States have become increasingly aware that this focus is skewed, that something is missing that will allow believers to achieve the vital, dynamic, relationship they have been called to with God and with others.

The Church has its “X Factor,” it has the tools once used by the early church and in the early Methodist movement, it has the story of God that continues to shape our story, and there are people all over the world hungering for this good news. As believers figure out that life is a journey and embark on this journey with God and others into the 21st century, may they strive for “holiness of heart and life” as God’s transformational power and love is pursued and all work to share that power and love with others.



SECTION TWO:  
NURTURING HOLINESS OF HEART AND LIFE: WHAT'S BEEN DONE  
AND UNDONE

*“Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit  
Into every troubled breast!  
Let us all in thee inherit;  
Let us find that second rest.  
Take away our bent to sinning;  
Alpha and Omega be;  
End of faith as its beginning,  
Set our hearts at liberty.  
—Charles Wesley<sup>1</sup>*

In 2008, it was reported by the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church that membership in the United States among United Methodists had decreased by 7% since 1998. In fact, membership has declined each year since the formation of the United Methodist denomination in 1968 (the joining of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church). While churches with larger memberships (300+) tend to grow numerically, the numbers within smaller membership churches (those with less than 180) continue to dwindle.<sup>2</sup> The question that has been raised over and over again is, “Why, with a theology of grace that brings hope to a hurting world, is the denomination continuing in decline?” While many answers have been postulated and many ideas adopted, the United Methodist denomination within the

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Wesley, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (1747), as found in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), hymn number 384.

<sup>2</sup> “2010 State of the Church Report: Membership,” *umc.org*, [http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.6072819/k.DC78/2010\\_State\\_of\\_the\\_Church\\_Membership.htm](http://www.umc.org/site/c.lwL4KnN1LtH/b.6072819/k.DC78/2010_State_of_the_Church_Membership.htm) (accessed September 3, 2012).

United States continues to struggle to find its “way” in a world that appears to be falling further from a relationship with God.

The world changes, the culture changes, our technology changes, the weather changes, even our age changes, and yet for some reason, church people are entrenched in “sameness.” It has been said that the seven last words of a dying church are: “We have always done it that way.” For many “change” is a dirty word. We humans do tend to love being comfortable. Being comfortable, however, does not seem to move us forward very far. Our spiritual lives tend to stagnate in sameness. Abiding in Christ becomes less about the journey and more about what one can “get” from the Divine. Church-going people begin to believe it is someone else’s job to “give” them what they need to become mature spiritual disciples of Jesus. The spiritual life is something tended to at church; the rest of the week is “mine.” How did we get to this place?

Dictionary.com defines change as “to make the form, nature, content, future course, etc., of (something) different from what it is or from what it would be if left alone.” The definition also includes “to become different; to become altered or modified; to become transformed or converted.” Jesus is a great example of one who spoke for alteration and transformation among his own religious tradition. A reading of the gospels indicates that the Jewish faith had become entrenched in its own type of “sameness” and “comfortableness” which was based on correctly following rules rather than engaging in relationships with one another. Jesus sought to alter the understanding and practice of the faith of his people: to make the form, nature, content and future course of their worship of the God of Abraham different and transformative. He offered a model of relationship building that included loving neighbors and treating one another with respect, as well as

mentorship. We, like the ancient Jewish people, in our attempt to worship God, have replaced relationship building with rules and mystery with absolutes. We have also erroneously replaced the desire to be a follower of Jesus with being a successful leader within a church.

Certainly all are not called to be leaders, but indeed, we are all called to be followers of the Anointed One, Jesus. My mentor and friend Leonard Sweet wrote:

Jesus didn't recruit leaders for his ministry. He didn't go to the local synagogue and place a notice on the bulletin board, announcing that he was taking resumes and setting up interviews for potential leaders. Nor did Jesus, as a pastor of a well-known church unabashedly brags, cultivate the skill of raiding other ministries for top-notch leaders. Jesus wasn't looking for leaders at all. Jesus was looking for followers.<sup>3</sup>

The Church has, for several years, looked to business models of leadership formation instead of Jesus' model to form disciples. Jesus' model sought to have believers "... 'love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.'"<sup>4</sup> As believers practiced this love in all aspects of their lives, they themselves would be transformed and mature spiritually as they journeyed with the God of creation and shared their love and faith with others. Today, Win and Charles Arn postulate that very few classes or programs within churches of all sizes reflect this vision of Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Instead, the top-down model of leadership instruction has been promoted, as clergy have become the all knowing "sage on the stage." Although

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<sup>3</sup> Leonard Sweet, *I Am A Follower*, Kindle location 484.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 22: 37-39, Common English Bible.

<sup>5</sup> Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1988) 13.

John Wesley exerted pastoral authority within the early Methodist movement, the movement was not propelled forward by the clergy's extraordinary preaching or teaching. In fact, clergy were scarce as they were assigned to large areas as pastors. Some churches/parishes had contact with clergy less than once a month.<sup>6</sup> No, the Methodist movement was propelled as followers of Jesus, laypeople, were blown by the winds of the Spirit to be in committed relationships with God and with one another as they led transformed lives following Jesus. This model, that promoted "followership" as clergy and laity both followed Jesus, seemed to work in the 18th and 19th centuries. While it may not work in the same way today, the church may be indeed leaning toward multi-church pastorates or bi-vocational clergy as it moves into the future. As the culture of both society and church change, this will not mean a "going back to the past," but rather an opportunity to redefine the idea of "leadership" in the church that will allow all people to live transformed lives as the Spirit's gifts are realized and shared in the world. As both clergy and laity develop these deep and abiding relationships with God through Jesus Christ and with one another, lives will be transformed as all begin to live in the power of salvation.<sup>7</sup>

John Wesley's vision was not to produce a new form of Christianity but to recover the simplicity of the gospel, theology, mission, and vision that was contagious

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<sup>6</sup> While I realize that preachers were scarce because there just wasn't enough of them to go around and that John Wesley probably would have appointed more into service if he had had them, the point is that because the clergy/preachers had only limited contact with the churches, the laity took the reins and propelled the movement into towns and cities that weren't previously served by the Anglican Church.

<sup>7</sup> Notwithstanding the importance of doctrine and theology, Wesley believed that doctrine and theology were to be transformational, not only informational. He did require the people called Methodists to understand the teachings of the Church, not however, via comprehension only, but by being apprehended by that knowledge so that their lives were transformed.

among the early Christians.<sup>8</sup> It is impossible, however, to read about the early Methodist movement without being captivated by the numerical achievements of that movement as it continued its momentum into the 19th century. Humankind, for whatever reason, has the longing to measure success. Even the early church is reported to have grown by thousands on the Day of Pentecost.<sup>9</sup> It was not, however, the need to increase the church in numbers that moved the early Christians described in the Book of Acts. The believers in the early church focused on devoting “themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers.”<sup>10</sup> This new faith community can be described in terms of what they believed was important: God’s presence with them, care for one another, unity among believers, and the unstoppable proclamation of the gospel.<sup>11</sup> Their focus was a commitment to learning more about Jesus, to being in relationship with each other as they shared everything, and to praying for one another and even those outside of the faith. Their life was one of simplicity and gladness, one of goodness shown to everyone.<sup>12</sup> These practices engaged them in deliberate discipleship and spiritual formation with one another so that as they grew in faith, they could share the stories of God’s work in their lives with others. As the first-century communities began to grow in numbers, they engaged in many disciplines that enabled them to “lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness,

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<sup>8</sup> George G. Hunter, III, *The Recovery of a Contagious Methodist Movement* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 2:41, Common English Bible.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 2:42, Common English Bible.

<sup>11</sup> *The Wesley Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), 1321.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 2:46-47, Common English Bible.

with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”<sup>13</sup> These spiritual and physical disciplines appear to have fostered intentional discipleship and faith formation within the community as the gospel of Jesus Christ spread across the lands.

The 21st-century church on the other hand, appears to have adopted a cultural value of focusing on measurable outcomes, as they measure membership, people served, baptisms, budgets, programs, etc. Numbers and measurements are not wrong in and of themselves, but when the promotion of numbers as the *primary* measure of success becomes the focus of the church, the church has misplaced its focus. It is necessary that the church does not get hung up only in a numerical measure of success, but on the importance of relationships with the Triune God and with others, on deepening their faith as they journey together, and on moving people toward holiness of heart and life. The use of numerical measurements is necessary for many areas of organized ministry. While numerical measurements do spur some people toward growth as they meet and keep specific goals, when the focus is only on measurable outcomes, many feel discouragement or a sense of failure. It does not appear that by using numbers as the primary measurement system, overall numerical growth has occurred within the United Methodist denomination. In our zeal to increase the Kingdom of God on Earth, we have often turned our focus from a commitment to developing a relationship with God and with one another, toward a commitment of measuring our own definitions of success.

One measure of this definition of success is the number of people that are in attendance at worship each Sunday at any given church, regardless of denomination.

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<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 4:1-3, Common English Bible.

“Ever since the Great Awakening in the 1740s, American pastors prove that God is blessing their church, their revival, or their religious tribe by inflating numbers of the faithful, while others try to rouse the spiritually lazy by criticizing their lack of church attendance.”<sup>14</sup> Alan Hirsch is credited with coining the word “attractional” to describe the way church has been done from the 1980s through today. This model of church “attracted” people into the church building hoping that their spiritual needs would be met. As their needs were met, it was expected that these people would form meaningful relationships with others at the church, be pointed to Christ, and eventually form a relationship with him as they were integrated into the life of the congregation.<sup>15</sup> Attractional churches incorporated a different music style that was more culturally contemporary and used technology to foster a more visual learning environment for people. What this model assumes is that (1) people will come to a church if the “right conditions” exist (i.e., it appeals to them, they agree with the doctrine), (2) people know what they want and need to meet their spiritual needs, and (3) spiritual growth occurs primarily through attending a weekly worship service regularly. People entered into religion like they shopped for furniture that “felt right” or met their needs at the time. It was inevitable that this type of model would emerge within a culture that has promoted individualism and a consumer mindset in relation to most issues in life. As people demanded choice in church, many Methodist denominations jumped on board this model with fervency. One irony today is that churches are touting “contemporary” music that

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<sup>14</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: Harper One, 2012), 16.

<sup>15</sup> Franklin Pyles, “Allan Hirsch and the Attractional Church Model,” (2009), <http://rebirthingsimpsonsvision.blogspot.com/2009/07/allan-hirsch-and-attractional-church.html> (accessed September 3, 2012).

hasn't been contemporary for over 30 years. Another is that decline continues even among those churches that have multiple types (i.e., traditional, contemporary, coffee house style, casual, liturgical) and days/times for worship services. The attractional church model, even within an individualistic, consumer-minded culture, does not appear to be increasingly transforming lives, even as the "form" of worship has changed.

Following these "attractional" and business-leadership type models, the mega membership Willow Creek Community Church, located in South Barrington, Illinois, brought in thousands to the church.<sup>16</sup> In 2006-2007, however, after a year of studying their ministry and whether or not the programs and activities of the church were contributing to the spiritual maturity of the attendees, they discovered information that was shocking to them. Pastor Bill Hybels said,

Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data actually came back, it wasn't helping people that much. Other things that we didn't put that much money into and didn't put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for.<sup>17</sup>

Willow Creek, like many other churches, is a program-driven church that used the measure of participation to determine whether or not someone was experiencing spiritual growth and following Jesus into the world. What their study showed was that reliance on participation in church programs and activities was not the preeminent way in which people would grow spiritually. In fact, what they found was that people were hungering for the age-old practices of scripture study, prayer, and relationships.<sup>18</sup> John Wesley

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<sup>16</sup> Bass, 73.

<sup>17</sup> UrL Scaramanga, "Willow Creek Repents?" *Leadership's Journal Out of Ur* (October 18, 2007), [www.outofur.com/archives/2007/10/willow\\_creek\\_re.html](http://www.outofur.com/archives/2007/10/willow_creek_re.html) (accessed September 3, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



would have told them this. But in reality, many United Methodist churches fell into the same types of cultural traps as they also sought to measure their success. This administrative, almost legalistic understanding of spiritual growth and maturity has played a part in the neglect of helping people move toward “holiness of heart and life.”

Still other churches dug their heels in, not wanting or seeing the need to make any changes in form, content, or in the future course they appeared to be taking. Success for them was in existing and taking care of the members of the church who had supported it through the years. And yet, many of the Wesleyan practices that would have led them to a deeper relationship with God and others were neglected or skimped upon as well. Many of the small, rural churches I served would often dodge deep discussions dealing with faith and religion and instead appeared content to take answers from the “educated” clergy. It is interesting to note that this malady has affected both the large and small churches, and probably those in between. Andrew C. Thompson reminds us that it was during the mid-19th century that Methodism began to move away from *transformational practices* (i.e., small group accountability, living according to the Methodist Rules of Life,<sup>19</sup> practicing the “means of grace”) to *informational practices* (i.e., Sunday school, belief centered, knowledge and instruction based). Thompson writes, “Before the appropriation of Sunday school, Methodists were taught how to *practice* their faith individually and together as a community. Once Sunday school became the norm,

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<sup>19</sup> Kevin M. Watson, *A Blueprint for Discipleship: Wesley’s General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2009), 121. Originally in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 9, Rupert E. Davies, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 69-73.

Methodists were taught *about* their faith.’<sup>20</sup> For a century and a half, Methodists in particular, have elevated learning *about* faith over *practicing* faith.

That’s not to say that many churches within the United Methodist denomination did not try to develop ways for believers to practice their faith. Thousands of people are sent out on “mission trips” designed to help people learn how to practice faith. These short-term trips are designed for believers to “reach out” to those who live differently, worship differently, and often demonstrate both physical and spiritual needs. The problem with these trips is that meaningful relationships are often not formed. A trip participant may never see again the persons they meet while spending a short time addressing the needs of that person. While these trips do enable both participants and recipients to experience God’s love in very practical ways, life for both parties often goes back to “normal” when the trip is over. Churches have also encouraged believers to be “in mission” by collecting items for groups in need or sending money to address needs of particular organizations or persons. This idea that practice can be separated from relationship would have seemed contrary to Wesley. He understood the gospel of Jesus Christ as transformative, not just informative. Mission would not have been an event or task one *did* sometimes, but how one *lived* in relation to humanity each day. Life for Christians is a life in the Spirit each and every day through all tasks. Life for a Christian is holistic. It involves all of ourselves immersed in the world in which we live as we relate to others. The Christian life cannot be separated into segments, such as spiritual or secular, and it cannot be lived in isolation.

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew C. Thompson, ed., *Generation Rising: A Future with Hope for the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 57ff.

Other churches, in order to encourage faith practice, strategically organize small group interactions among congregation members. Many follow outdated educational models where instructors teach what they know to a small group of people who “receive” this knowledge. After receiving this knowledge that is designed to change lives, they are sent into the world to use what they have “received.” Within this model there is a distinct separation between the learning and the doing. There is also a distinct separation between learning *about* God rather than entering into a relationship *with* God as we build relationships with others. Perhaps churches should be congratulated for at least trying to get people together. After all, the process of relationship building does take time. There are, however, small groups in existence in churches all over America that lack practices that purposefully lead people into a relationship with God and with others. It is as if the belief is held that if a church puts people together in small groups, no matter the venue or program, they will talk about spiritually deep matters—matters of their soul, matters that involve the journey with God and with one another, matters that expose a rich and resonate telling of individual stories and how God’s story is a part of their lives.

The Church, regardless of denomination and as the institution it has become, cannot be sustained if it continues on its current trajectory. Many have projected more house churches or missional communities. Still others have predicted the total demise of all organized religions. Buzz words like emergent, missional, and spiritual flood current literature. Although the words used to predict what the church will look like are different, there seems to be a common thread running throughout: the importance of a relational faith. “If the primary relationships of our church members lie in their relationship to the church en masse rather than in life-on-life connections with one another, then we have

missed the sweet spot.”<sup>21</sup> John Wesley would have agreed. It is certainly within this “sweet spot” that we engage in a deep and abiding relationship with God through Jesus Christ as the Spirit guides and informs all life. Additionally, and simultaneously, as God reveals God’s self to us, our relationships with others improve as we study together, minister together, encourage one another, and hold each other accountable in love to live a life of holiness. These relationships, formed and empowered by the Spirit, are the foundation of what it means to embrace “holiness of heart and life.”

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<sup>21</sup> Leonard Sweet, *I Am a Follower*, Kindle location 1544.

SECTION THREE:  
HOLINESS OF HEART AND LIFE FOR THE 21ST-CENTURY CHURCH

*Let your religion be less of a theory and more of a love affair.*  
—G.K. Chesterton<sup>1</sup>

C.S. Lewis says in *Mere Christianity*, “We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.”<sup>2</sup> People of all ages are beginning to recognize that their religion is usually anything but progressive – meaning favoring or advocating progress, change, improvement, or reform, as opposed to wishing to maintain things as they are; also meaning to turn back to the “right road” to get nearer to the place we are meant to be. Many have become disillusioned with religion-as-usual; a religion that embraces individualism and often feels oppressive, irrelevant, and meaningless. While western culture has moved into the postmodern era, many churches continue to hold on to practices that are outdated and no longer helping to transform the lives of those living in today’s world.

Although the definition of the term “postmodern” differs widely between disciplines, it often involves a recovery of older styles and methods, a rejection of sharp differences between fields of knowledge, and a flattening of past hierarchies.<sup>3</sup> Leonard

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<sup>1</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (Waiheke Island: Floating Press, 2009), 13, <http://catalog.georgefox.edu/record=b1628921~S0> (accessed October 27, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 28.

Sweet, in his book *Post-Modern Pilgrims*, gives an overview of the religious characteristics of a “post-modern” person:

- they want to experience life for themselves;
- they are not willing to live an arm’s length away from experience;
- they want life to explode with experience all around them;
- they want their information laced with experience;
- they luxuriate in mystery – don’t need everything explained;
- they are from a digital culture which allows for participation;
- they want to be full partners in ministry, totally participating in all of the life of the church;
- they prefer worship that allows for interaction;
- they live in an image-driven society in which images generate emotions and they respond to those emotional feelings;
- they respond well to images, metaphor, and story;
- they operate from within a culture that believes in connections as well as community;
- they want to experience God, not only in personal ways but in communal ways as well;
- worship for the post-modern should be a dance between reflecting and refracting.<sup>4</sup>

In the article “A Spiritual Exegesis of Y2K and Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” Sweet discusses how the game show “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” became so popular. He says, “This show has made the transition from rational to experiential, from representative to participative, from word-based to image-based, and from individual to connected. In other words, it is EPIC programming. The recovery of Christianity in the next millennium is likely to be based on whether or not the church can carve (not cast) its ministries into more EPIC shape.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, to be in ministry to and with the 21st

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<sup>3</sup> Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 30.

<sup>4</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 33-147.

century adult, the church should strive for experiential, participatory, image-driven, and connected ministry.

James K.A. Smith, in his book *Who's Afraid of Post-Modernism: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church*, argues that the church must learn from postmodernism how to reclaim and renew its premodern heritage that has been lost among the individualistic and consumer-driven mindsets of the modern age. Smith urges Christian practitioners engaged in ministry to not be afraid of postmodernity but to embrace it as a way to retool the church's witness.<sup>6</sup> Smith's examples of what a post-modern church looks like include:

- A church that embraces Word, sacrament, prayer, and singing to equip and empower the saints to see through the worldly interpretations offered by the cultural forces of capitalism, consumerism, and hedonism.<sup>7</sup>
- A church that affirms the timelessness (and timeliness) of the biblical narrative as it is told; not trying to “dumb down” the story to make it attractive or accessible to culture.<sup>8</sup>
- A church with incarnational worship—a worship that both invites in the lost as well as builds up the saints so that all can be formed into people that pursue the kingdom with heart, soul, mind, and strength.<sup>9</sup>
- A church that recognizes that its primary responsibility is to live the story for the world; that story telling should be supported by story living.<sup>10</sup>
- A church that makes disciples who *act* in a certain way, not ones who only *think* in a certain way. This is done by enacting disciplines that run counter to the dominant culture's understanding of the human calling.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Leonard Sweet, “A Spiritual Exegesis of Y2K and Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” *leonardsweet.com* (2000), [http://www.leonardsweet.com/article\\_details.php?id=19](http://www.leonardsweet.com/article_details.php?id=19) (accessed July 20, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Post-Modernism: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2006), 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

- A radically orthodox church that is not traditionalist, but traditioned; not a going back to “the way we used to do it” but a dynamic re-appropriation of ancient practices as the very material means that will enable people to be formed differently, as representatives in the world who will counter the practices of modernity’s consumer-driven market and empire.<sup>12</sup>

According to Smith, worship style and content in a postmodern world involves an appreciation and a re-formation of the past, the ability to *be* the church in the present as its people engage in living the biblical narrative, and the necessity to form countercultural disciples to live into the future as agents of the gospel.

Colin Greene and Martin Robinson postulate, in their book *Metavista: Bible, Church, and Mission in an Age of Imagination*, that the world is really engaged in a “post-post-modern” cultural shift. They suggest that postmodernity has only reconfigured a failed modern story around a scripture that is no longer told as narrative, but has been isolated into micro-narratives and periscopes that have no thematic tension or eschatological resolution.<sup>13</sup> They believe that post-post-modernity “is seeking to re-engage with the textual world of the Bible and re-imagine the community that reads such texts.”<sup>14</sup> As this occurs, the world of the Bible is then freed from the past confines and restrictions of history, so that God’s story can begin to interact with our own story in the world, as new and innovative narratives are created. God’s story doesn’t change; the good news is still good news! What changes is the imaginative way the story is re-created and re-told so that it is significant for lives within the cultural community. People are

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>13</sup> Colin Greene and Martin Robinson, *Metavista: Bible, Church and Mission in an Age of Imagination* (Colorado Springs: Authentic Media, 2008), 104.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



then able to relate once again to God’s narrative as it is explored in new and creative ways.

These ideas of re-forming, re-newing, re-imagining, re-thinking, re-telling, and re-connecting are definitely not new ones. In fact, the first Christian believers totally changed the way religion was “done.” Adolph Harnack writes:

Such a religious and social organization, destitute of any political or national basis and yet embracing the entire private life, was a novel and unheard of thing upon the soil of Greek and Roman life, where religious and social organizations only existed as a rule in quite a rudimentary form, and where they lacked any religious control of life as a whole. All that people could think of in this connection was one or two schools of philosophy, whose common life was also a religious life. But here was a society which united fellow-believers, who were resident in any city, in the closest of ties, presupposing a relationship which was assumed as a matter of course to last through life itself, furnishing its members not only with holy unction administered once and for all or from time to time, but with a daily bond which provided them with spiritual benefits and imposed duties on them, assembling them at first daily and then weekly, shutting them off from other people, uniting them in a guild of worship, a friendly society, and an order with a definite line of life in view, besides teaching them to consider themselves as the community of God.<sup>15</sup>

Although the ancient Christians lived in a time that was very different from ours, the tenets that they held as important to their faith involved experience, participation, and community. For the early Christians, as they followed Jesus, they *were* his disciples, sent to tell everyone the good news. The stories that they knew about Jesus were alive in them and they *became* the gospel to all around them.<sup>16</sup>

John Wesley believed that the more the church became institutionalized, the more it lost its primary focus – to offer the means necessary for lives to be transformed as

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<sup>15</sup> Adolf Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, trans. James Moffatt, vol. I (Gloucester: Harper & Row Publishers, 1972), 432.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Hirsch and Darryn Artclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 65.

people developed a relationship with God and others. During Wesley's life, it seemed as if Christianity was only important at births, marriages, and deaths. Anyone baptized and confirmed a member of the church was designated a "Christian" regardless of how they lived their lives. Soren Kierkegaard once said, "The problem is that when everyone is a Christian, no one is a Christian."<sup>17</sup> Wesley understood this to be the root of the problem: that while people were "memberized" into the church, they did not fully understand what it meant to be an actual follower of Jesus Christ. He understood Christianity not as a theory or a network of explanations, but as one great promise that brings us to God and recreates us in God's image.<sup>18</sup> He believed that the fundamental character of the Christian faith involved both moral and spiritual transformation as one personally fell in love with God through God's Son, Jesus the Christ.<sup>19</sup> He recognized, however, that the Christian faith was not experienced in isolation but in community. People do not usually come to faith because of confrontational evidence but because they have developed a relationship with someone who loves them unconditionally, or someone who exhibits a life of holiness overall.<sup>20</sup> Wesley was convinced that a life of holiness is formed and nurtured through growing communion with the Triune God in Christian community.<sup>21</sup> Because of his deep beliefs, he set out to re-form, re-new, re-imagine, re-think, and re-connect people

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<sup>17</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 539.

<sup>18</sup> William J. Abraham, *Aldersgate and Athens: John Wesley and the Foundations of Christian Belief* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>21</sup> Sondra Higgins Matthaei, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 12-13.

with the Triune God as they re-connected with God and with one another in Christian community.

While “spiritual formation” is a term often used to describe the development of a person’s relationship to the totality of life, often outside of the Christian tradition, Christian “spiritual” or “faith formation” is a partnership of both God’s and humanity’s actions.<sup>22</sup> Matthaëi defines Christian faith formation as:

A participation in God’s work of inviting persons to relationship with God, self, others, and creation. Faith formation instills Christian values and beliefs and also guides the development of a Christian lifestyle so that each person might respond in faith to God’s prevenient grace. The process of faith formation nurtures Christian identity and vocation in disciples who are called to do God’s work in the world. This occurs through participation in the life of the church and sharing responsibilities for teaching, leading, caring, and serving, as we learn what it means to be a Christian.<sup>23</sup>

Wesley called this process of faith formation “holiness of heart and life,” which he simply defined as “loving God and neighbor.” Holiness of heart focuses on gaining a deeper relationship with God by participating in acts of piety: corporate worship, private and public prayer, studying scripture, and participating in the sacrament of Holy Communion.<sup>24</sup> Holiness of life focuses on participating in acts of mercy: visiting prisoners, caring for the sick, feeding the poor, teaching orphans, and expressing the love of neighbor through this outward holiness exhibited in all of life.<sup>25</sup> Not only did the individual have responsibilities toward a participation in their own faith formation, the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 26.

church did as well. Wesley believed the church's responsibility was to nurture and support believers as they responded to the urgings of the Holy Spirit for their ongoing faith growth and journey.<sup>26</sup>

Wesley ordered the early Methodists into groups that he believed would aid them in achieving holiness of heart and life. He believed that all people should and could be perfected by God's grace. For Wesley, learning more about God came by doing God's will; in other words, learning came by experience. Learning was expedited by group participation and not by acting in isolation. If people would participate together in the "means of grace" (practices within the church that would help people to let God into their lives, such as communion or prayer) then human progress was bound to happen (as well as loving God and neighbor). All members of the early Methodist movement accepted a share in the ministry of the congregation. The ministry was divided among the entire body of believers, not just the leadership or appointed clergy. This set Methodism apart from other religions that touted a one-person ministry. The practice enabled the leaders within Methodism to focus on training and equipping the leaders who were continuing to grow in spiritual maturity.<sup>27</sup> Everyone was responsible for discipleship and aiding in spiritual growth throughout the body.<sup>28</sup> This appears to stem from Wesley's continuing belief that God's grace is quantitatively present and active in all believers and therefore each believer must practice receiving and sharing this grace in all moments of life.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>27</sup> This action is similar to what the Apostles did in Acts 6 when they chose people to organize the daily food service so that no one was overlooked.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 128.

Continued growth and spiritual maturity in following Christ, as well as developing a way of living in God's grace, was the goal of the early Methodist believers. They expected a developing relationship with Jesus to change their lives in ways they could never accomplish by themselves. A believer becomes holy as they journey with God, as they allow God's grace to take over their lives. Wesley taught that this holiness would be evidenced in both inward and outward signs. The inward signs were joy, peace, love, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and patience as well as the assurance that sin was forgiven. The outward signs would be seen in living a life of Christlikeness; in respecting and serving those not like them; and in how they cared for the earth, their bodies, and for others. For the early Methodist believer, participating in the "means of grace" offered through the church kept them drawing closer to God through Jesus Christ and enabled them to experience their faith, to participate in it fully, and to join together with other believers as they lived a life transformed as the hands and feet of Jesus within their communities. Their faith was not only of heart (personal for themselves) but also of life (shared with others). While Wesley seemed to have many "rules" in place for his organized groups, his primary focus was not on keeping the rules, but on helping people develop a lifelong relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and to be transformed by this relationship with God in the body of Christ. These acts of discipling others and aiding them in their spiritual faith formation were carried out in community and were of the utmost importance in the movement. As the community increased in faith, they became witnesses in word and deed as they shared God's grace and love with others.

The Wesleyan practices of discipleship and faith formation were all connected and were carried out in intimate small group settings, as well as within the church.

Wesley's goal of "holiness of heart and life" was accomplished in a way that developed a connection between being a disciple and discipling others, growing in Christian faith individually and in community, and living a life that bore witness to the real presence of God working within both the individual and the church community. Success for Wesley and the people called Methodists was not in their budgets or buildings, but in lives transformed by God's amazing grace. Wesley's ideas were extremely creative and imaginative for the times that he lived in as he sought to realize a church people who not only knew who God was, but knew God in such a personal way that it changed their lives. He believed that faith was not only something learned, but more importantly, it was something lived. When people truly came to realize that God's grace was free and not dependent on good works, when people truly came to know that Jesus took away *their* sins, when people truly knew in their hearts that God loved them unconditionally, then they would be so moved as to actively live out this understanding in all the moments of their lives. Wesley's passion for this way of believing was contagious as people from every form of societal norms were offered God's free grace.

What has happened to the contagious passion of these beliefs within American Methodism? Robert Wuthnow explains the history of American religion during the time of the Enlightenment (18th century) in his book, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*.<sup>29</sup> During this period, there were those who believed that "reason" was enough to guide all people at all times and in all places to a true knowledge of the nature of God. This "Age of Reason" morphed into the Industrial Revolution, a time that was marked by

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

scientific discoveries and the need to base one's ideas upon factual information. With the invention of machines, America saw a boom in individual prosperity and success. The first half of the 20th century was marked by the development of a fundamental set of beliefs for all 'good' Americans. After WWII, America began to build what was dubbed "The American Dream;" the soldiers who came home went to school, married, and settled down with a steady job and the goal of owning a piece of this "dream." America was strong and the institutions that it created flourished. It was a world that was built on both science and reason. This new way of understanding faith boosted the need for religion to engage with philosophy as well as the current intellectuals of the day. This led to an increase of American Christians that tackled social issues and proclaimed a new form of ecumenicalism, especially in evangelism. These new evangelicals wanted to spar with the best and brightest of the day. They pushed for accreditation of their colleges and seminaries. They sent their brightest to Ivy League schools for doctorates in theology and philosophy. They were a force to be reckoned with as faith and theology became something to be defended. What they lost, however, was the connection with the practice of ministry—how theology mattered to the regular people.<sup>30</sup> Many American Christians, including Methodist believers, became followers of a reasonable idea, rather than following the One who transforms hearts and lives. Mega-churches were born and anything resembling "traditional church practices" was viewed as a dying horse. Traditional theological issues were laid aside in order to come up with creative, practical solutions to "doing church" and "being church." Although intellectual theology perished,

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<sup>30</sup> Robert Webber, ed., *Listening to the Beliefs of Emerging Churches: Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 11.

churches that focused on meeting the needs of people in practical ways thrived. These churches became places where all people were welcomed, and those with specific physical and/or emotional needs were served. What they lacked however, was the presence of a “theological vision for ministry.”<sup>31</sup>

As church-goers concentrated on meeting the practical needs of people in their communities and across the globe, spiritual/faith formation was a hoped-for outcome for both the servers and those being served. This disconnect between spiritual growth and service continued to exist in many churches. In other congregations, those being served were “gospelized” and often scared into believing so their sinful souls would not be doomed to hell. Spiritual growth was often equal to following certain requirements that were biblically factual, literal, taken out of context, and centered on the individual. Service to others then became a detached form of “mission” that rarely involved forming relationships with the people being served. While church-goers did experience and participate in helping others, there was no sense of engaging the “other” in the faith community. Ministry was often “for” the other, not “with” the other.

As the late Modern Era swept across America (from the late 19th throughout the 20th centuries), technology exploded and further alienated people from face-to-face interaction and relationship building. People began to get their information from television and the internet. In the blink of an eye, you could find out all you needed to know about God. Belief was still primarily head-knowledge with a discernible disconnect from the heart. Many churches jumped on the technology bandwagon, installing big screens in worship settings in order to attract the generation who had grown up in an

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 15.



image-rich environment. Still others worked to change worship into something “relevant” to those living in the modern age. While these changes, in and of themselves, were not faulty in their intention, there continued a sense of disengagement between the process of faith and the sense of belonging to a community of faith. The boundaries of faith involvement were relegated to the church building and conversations about theological issues, faith formation, and how humanity’s story intersects with God’s story were rarely held outside these boundaries.

If this is what the church has become, how then can we possibly move from these institutional boundaries to renew the movement that once focused on leading people into transformative relationships and practices that would reorient their lives toward a pursuit of holiness of heart and life in community for the sake of the world? Perhaps we need to remember that although John Wesley did indeed start a movement, it was started within an already-existing institution (the Church of England). The Methodist movement became an institution—that is true. And yet Wesley, who never intended to create a new institution, was able to organize and lead people into something different from what the institutional church offered, while at the same time remaining a part of the Church of England. His movement, dubbed “Methodist” in an attempt to slander the methodical practices he and his friends engaged in,<sup>32</sup> pushed against the institutional boundaries of the Church, but for the most part continued to stay within them. Wesley recognized something within the institution that he believed needed changing (primarily a functional/practical form of ministry rather than only a knowledge-based form) and he set out to help others see this need. He often used the institution’s own practices to further

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<sup>32</sup> Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 42.

his cause. For example, every participant was expected to contribute at least a penny to the common pot. While this money did not go toward clergy salary or pension plans, Wesley did recognize the need for money to care for the sick and the poor, as well as the act of giving as “fruit-bearing.” He also was a stickler for counting participants. His precise record keeping is one reason why Methodists have been keeping membership records for years. In other words, Wesley was able to use some of the institutional nuances to help propel his own innovative ideas and beliefs about faith, spiritual formation, and discipleship. While the institutional structure of all denominations looms ever large before us, perhaps we too can use what we may need within the institution to help propel a renewed vision and hope into the future. Will this be easy? No. Will it even be possible today? I’m not sure, but in order to move people toward transformative relationships with God and with one another as we all seek after holiness of heart and life within our communities, it is worth an honest try. Just as Wesley never intended to form a new institution, perhaps the Methodist understanding of God’s grace and love for all of humanity will continue to be offered to a hurting world in ways that are vital and transformative for the 21st-century adult.

In 2011, Bishop John R. Schol, team leader of the Vital Congregations Initiative of the United Methodist Church, gave a description of a “vital congregation” at the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference. This description includes:

- Inviting and inspiring worship;
- Engaged disciples in mission and outreach;
- Gifted, equipped, and empowered by leadership;
- Effective, equipped, and inspired clergy leadership;
- Small groups and strong children’s programs and youth ministry;

- Numerical growth over time, engaging more people in ministry, and people more generous in giving to mission.<sup>33</sup>

While these characteristics are broad and open to interpretation, one cannot help but wonder where discipleship and spiritual formation fits in. Do we experience faith formation in worship? Is it something that should grow from engaging in mission and outreach? As we discover our spiritual gifts and are empowered by leadership, will this draw us closer to God and to one another? Does spiritual/faith formation play a role in what an effective, equipped, inspired clergy leader looks like? Do small groups and programs invite an intentional discipleship element? If a church increases in numbers of people in the pews, people engaged in ministry, and people giving more to mission, does that mean that their faith and spirit are being formed so that they begin to live incarnationally in the world, sharing their faith with others? The answer to all of these questions is, hopefully, “yes.” But if one looks at the status of most of the United Methodist churches across America, the answer to many of these questions may be “perhaps,” or even “no.” Again, while these are open to interpretation, and while it is likely the expectation that heart and life transformation exists within each of these, the absence of a concentration on intentional discipleship and spiritual formation practices could leave one believing that these are perhaps optional.

It may be that all church-goers have already asked Jesus into their hearts and because they are participating in Christian activities then they must be growing in their faith. This is an erroneous assumption. Kennon L. Callahan, in his book *Effective Church*

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<sup>33</sup> Barbara Dunlap-Berg, “Vital Churches Share Common Characteristics,” *umc.org* (2011) <http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=IwL4KnNlLh&b=5259669&ct=11104179> (accessed October 27, 2012).

*Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys*, writes, "...it is precisely because so many churches continue to believe and act as though this is a church culture that we have so many stable and declining and dying churches as we do."<sup>34</sup> We live in a religiously and culturally diverse world. Many adults no longer want to be told what to believe but rather want to be allowed to safely, and without judgment, explore religion and faith so they can begin to make sense of the chaos of the world around them and find a meaningful way of existing in this world within a loving community. It is no longer enough to only provide programs and activities for engaging in community or mission and hoping that a new generation of Christians will be formed. It is time that the people who call themselves Methodist revive the Wesleyan practices of discipleship and spiritual formation in such a way that believers will understand the importance of progressing in faith with others who are also engaged in the journey.

Mack Stokes defines "Vital Christianity" as the grace of God dwelling within the hearts of people.<sup>35</sup> The early Methodists believed it was this grace that made them holy as they journeyed with God and allowed it to take over their lives. It seems as if the Church has substituted many of the formative spiritual disciplines that were important to the early Methodists with programs and activities aimed solely at increasing knowledge about God and scripture. Additionally, a focus on the practice of just meeting the immediate physical needs of others has replaced spiritual formation methods. While these activities are often aimed at helping people learn more about God and experience the Christian

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<sup>34</sup> Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1990), 14.

<sup>35</sup> Stokes, 20.

faith outside of themselves, there is often little time made for conversation, sharing of thoughts, discussion of God, or lasting relationship-building between those “serving” and those being “served.”

In the spring of 2011, an electronic survey designed to determine which practices of discipleship, spiritual/faith formation, and evangelism were being observed was conducted among United Methodist clergy across America.<sup>36</sup> It appears, even from the limited results of the survey (only 72 churches responded, although it was sent to each Conference in the U.S.), that many United Methodists believe that they are indeed engaged in practices of discipleship, spiritual formation, and evangelism. Many discipleship opportunities, however, appeared instructional/teacher-student in nature. Although clergy were involved in leading small groups, it was encouraging to see that congregation members were also very involved in leading them as well. Another interesting observation was that clergy and laity, while participating in “means of grace,” appear to have become comfortable in the particular “means” that they participate in most of the time (prayer, searching the scriptures, and public worship were the top three reported for both clergy and laity participation). Of course, the clergy were responding to how *they believed* their congregants were observing the “means of grace” listed for them in the survey. Still, it may be reflective of the overall comfortableness of many churches as they continue to minister in ways that may not be speaking to the 21st-century adult.

Just as Wesley’s ideas were extremely creative and imaginative for the times that he lived in, the ideas for these times should be as well. Wesley’s goal was to make disciples who not only knew who God was (head), but knew God in such a personal way

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<sup>36</sup> See Appendix B for a copy of the survey and overall results.

that it changed their lives (heart). The practices in discipleship and spiritual formation promoted by Wesley fostered communion with the Triune God in Christian community, equipped believers to follow Jesus into the world as they were transformed by God's love and grace working in their lives, and enabled them to live Christ-centered, incarnational lives. As the Church embraces the directive to "make disciples for the transformation of the world," previous practices in spiritual or faith formation can and should be renewed in ways that speak to the hearts of people in today's world. Ideas for renewing and reforming some of these practices are included in Appendix B (Reforming Wesley's Groups for the 21st Century). The Church already has what is necessary for vital congregations—the good news of God's free grace through Jesus Christ offered to all who believe. Methodism already has defined spiritual practices that in the past were used to help instill this life-changing news within the hearts of men and women from all walks of life. We need no other stimulants for vitality. There are no great secrets for church growth. Growth and life come when hearts are changed and people begin to live their lives in ways that bring love and grace to others. While new programs and activities may entice people for a while, perhaps the tried and true disciplines of the past can continue to aid the faithful as they journey each day with God, as they strive to live a holy life, and as they strive to love neighbor as themselves.

As the Church continues to re-think how to "do" and "be" the Church in the 21st century, perhaps a new vision will be revealed for the practices in spiritual and faith formation that once brought Methodists together as an intentional community of faith with an ongoing passion for staying close to God and to one another in all of life. Perhaps, once again, through the Methodist denomination, a movement will begin that

offers love and grace unconditionally to others as strong spiritual friendships are forged. Perhaps those “offering Christ” will come to understand that the offering is not only about meeting physical needs, and will find a renewed dedication for addressing spiritual needs as well. Perhaps once more, holiness of heart and life will be more than some old practices, but instead will become a renewed tradition that shapes and forms people in the image of God, living and breathing God’s amazing grace for the world, as hearts, lives, and congregations are revitalized and transformed.

As the body of Christ begins to realize that they cannot grow spiritually in isolation, as they come to understand that disciples are made within relationships, and as they comprehend that it can no longer be business as usual within the church, the re-formation of spiritual disciplines may begin to occur naturally as spiritually hungry people want to live a better life in harmony with the God of creation. While the current model of the church is to “become missional,” this is only one part of living a life of holiness. The heart must be engaged as well. The ultimate way to commission the heart is to “offer them Christ”<sup>37</sup> so that as God’s love and grace through Jesus Christ abounds within their hearts, both heart and life will ever strive to be holy.

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<sup>37</sup> Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. 1 (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1838), 191. This book is no longer in copyright and has been digitized by Google from the library of the New York Public Library and uploaded to the Internet by user tpb. Available at <http://archive.org/details/ahistorymethodi01banggoog>. (accessed December 13, 2012).

## SECTION FOUR:

### STORIES OF ENGAGEMENT: HOLINESS OF HEART AND LIFE IN PRACTICE

*“God has made us for himself. Our first and last end is to love him, and to enjoy him forever. This is holiness of heart and life, and it was Wesley’s witness in live and death.”*  
—Albert C. Outler<sup>1</sup>

The Springwater Community of Faith in Portland, Oregon appears to understand this need for the engagement of both heart and life as they covenant together in an intentional community. The members of this community have committed to what Wesley would have called “holiness of heart and life;” simply, loving the Lord your God with everything, and loving your neighbor as yourself. They meet regularly in small groups of 3 to 4 adults called “TIL-ing (Together in Love) groups. These groups encompass not only study and prayer together, but they offer a place of unconditional love and grace as they are each called to accountability for the way they live their lives and grow in faith. This intentional space strengthens, disciples, and aids in faith formation for all participants. One group member said, “My group helps me connect to God and others on a heart level.” This community also practices communal living that allows them the opportunity to intentionally practice loving reconciliation regularly as they live together and many families become one family. Each member of the community covenants to participate in spiritual formation practices within each household, although they do have difficulty setting aside time for this due to work schedules. The process requires

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<sup>1</sup> Albert C. Outler, *Evangelism and Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996), 131.



discipline and responsibility, personal and as a household, as they endeavor to grow together in faith.

The entire community meets together weekly with an organized, shared “ownership” of worship as they take turns leading and observing different faith practices, which always includes weekly participation in Holy Communion. This faith community is also very active within the community of Lents, in Southeast Portland, where they live and work. They are intentional about meeting and forming lasting relationships with each other and with neighbors, even if those neighbors are not a part of a faith community. They plan and participate in a “mission/outreach” event within the community each month. These events could be as simple as raking the yards of their neighbors or as complex as collecting items and giving them out during the holidays. They spend intentional time on retreat together yearly as they renew themselves spiritually together as a community. Is this faith community perfect? No, but they appear to be “moving toward perfection,” as Wesley would say, as they intentionally participate in spiritual faith formation disciplines with passion and commitment as they grow in the love of God through Jesus, the Christ.

Another group that engages the postmodern believer is the Emerging Church discussion group that meets in Charlotte, North Carolina. This group is opened to all people and is held monthly in a coffee shop. The purpose is to provide a space for people to question, to search, to vent, to proclaim, to encourage, and to experience unconditional love and acceptance. While they are not a church in the traditional sense of the word, they are working together through developing relationships to aid people in their spiritual faith formation. Participants are encouraged to come with an open mind and heart as they are

often engaged outside of their comfort zones. Participants are encouraged to think about and chew on the discussions. They are given a safe place to meet “the other,” whether that person is of a different faith, political party, culture, or lifestyle. As participants become partners in faith formation, they are then able to go into their own faith communities as ambassadors for God, equipped with new tools, new information, and safe relationships of encouragement and hope.

Central United Methodist Church in Monroe, North Carolina has adopted a program called “Lifetree Cafe” from Group Publishing ([group.com/lifetree-cafe](http://group.com/lifetree-cafe)). While this is a packaged program, it has allowed this church to step outside of their comfort zone into the community in a practical and yet spiritual way. Facilitators are trained, licensed, provided with the tools they will need, and then sent into the community to host an hour-long, interactive experience held in a coffee-house setting. The hour features people’s stories on film, guided conversation, biblical insights, and relationship building. Central UMC has gone even a step further by encouraging attendees to be involved in helping others. Participants have collected eyeglasses, money for mosquito netting to help eliminate malaria in Africa, and “gear” for the homeless among them in the community. One facilitator commented, “For me, as someone who grew up in the church, this program has caused me to be more open to engaging and accepting others, even when their beliefs differ from mine. It also helps me bring my Christian spiritual life into my secular world every day. I am becoming more comfortable in sharing my faith in a natural way.” While the church has not seen an increase in the number of people attending the church, lives of both facilitators and participants are being transformed as they engage in conversation about the practical aspects of life and they grow spiritually

together. They all have covenanted to practice their motto, “Doing Life. Doing Good.” as they learn more about themselves and God with both head and heart.

As the church, the body of Christ, begins to explore ways to incorporate both heart and life into its presence and existence in communities all over the U.S., people will begin to be shaped in spirit and faith. People will grow closer to God and to one another as they fully grasp that holiness of heart and life cannot be separated. That is the main point: in order to find balance in life, to grow to the utmost of our potential as Christ followers, holiness of heart cannot be separated from holiness of life. The symbiotic relationship that exists between heart and life is one that has propelled believers forward into the world for centuries. It is truly impossible to grow in one without growing in the other and having the fruits of that growth spill out affecting lives and hearts of those around us. Not only is growth evidenced in the visible realm (outward actions; drawing closer to others), but in the spiritual realm (inward disciplines; drawing closer to God) providing believers with the gift of balance. This balance, searched for by all of humanity, comes to us when we begin to take the responsibility necessary to achieve both holiness of heart and life. Here are a few examples to help believers strive for that balance in their lives:

- Become intimate with scripture by reading it, discussing it, and living its precepts. Start with the Gospels to discover the character and mission of Jesus Christ.
- “Act your way into a new way of thinking.”<sup>2</sup> If your behavior changes, so will your way of thinking.
- Pray. This can and does include being *still* with God through contemplation, confession, and meditation. This includes both personal and corporate prayer as well.

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<sup>2</sup> Hirsch and Artclass, 66.

- Commit to participating in ministry with a body of believers. Worship together, join together in the Lord's Supper, celebrate together, learn together, and generously serve others together.
- Take personal responsibility for the way you use your money, the resources that are available to you, and your time.
- Be devoted to your community. Love your zip code and commit to serving the needs of that community, as well as building them up in love. Do not only identify with the people; become one of them.
- Gather with others frequently in some sort of meaningful connection. Use to time to get to know one another deeply, to share concerns and praises, to support and encourage one another, and to discuss life. Become involved with people who are not in the religious community and begin to bring meaning and spiritual reflection into their lives. Make relationship building a priority and allow for time and space to do so.
- Begin to see that everyday life, its experiences and its pleasures, are gifts from God. Embrace this as a way of holy living that mirrors how Jesus lived among and with others. Others will then be able to see Jesus in your actions.
- Practice hospitality. Share meals with others as you welcome, celebrate, and nourish one another. Share your table with the poor as often as possible. Be revolutionary as you engage with people who live and/or think differently than you.
- Engage in a radical “party” life that helps people feel they belong and are safe to engage at deeper levels. Enjoy having fun while living like Jesus!
- Experiment with worship rituals, symbols, style, music, and mission opportunities. Dream of what things might look like and do not be afraid to change or try new ideas. Celebrate the unique gifts that God gives everyone. Reflect regularly on the overall ministry direction and effectiveness.
- Keep the message simple, yet profound – “Jesus is Lord,” or “God loves you.” Offer hope. Listen to others. Present them with grace, love, mercy, and forgiveness as you share your own story of your relationship with God.
- Engage in mission with others. Care for the environment together. Volunteer your time at a local non-profit. Pursue justice issues with others in the community.
- Take risks, experiment, and be adventurous in life as you embody the life that proclaims Jesus as Lord.<sup>3</sup>

The Wesleyan model of “holiness of heart and life” provides an important tradition steeped in healthy, balanced spirituality that is essential for the church in the postmodern world. Perhaps we can stop focusing on the physical growth of numbers and begin to focus on the spiritual growth of the people that will produce the kind of healthy,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 70-183.

vital churches we are so desperate for. Perhaps, in order to be healthy, we need to lose some weight, bring our numbers down, stop serving so much sugar, or contributing to the fat of the hierarchy. A healthy body does not always need to “grow” but a healthy body is always going through changes, seeking balance and harmony within the systems of the body. To be healthy takes work, takes responsibility, takes discipline. To have a healthy Christian life, we must continue to be re-shaped and re-formed, allowing our hearts and lives to so intertwine that God’s love is visible throughout every system of our bodies and lives. The Church, especially the Methodist denomination, has the model and knows the importance of a lifetime of spiritual formation, yet for so many years has engaged itself in less urgent matters. Now is the time. Now is the time for, as Leonard Sweet wrote, “telling the holy, telling the sacred, telling the holiness”<sup>4</sup> so that believers will want to spend their lives seeking perfect love with God and neighbor, living fully with heart and life always related, and drawing closer daily as they grow in God’s grace through the love of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> Leonard Sweet. *11 Genetic Gateways to Spiritual Awakening* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 142.

SECTION FIVE:  
ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

This book is the story of one person's journey to recover the Wesleyan understanding of "holiness of heart and life." While the book provides a brief overview of the historical formative practices of John Wesley that helped to shape the movement of Methodism, the focus is on the pursuit of "holiness of heart and life" while participating in the "means of grace." It is when the early Methodists participated in the "means" that a group of people were formed who were: (1) committed to one another in love for accountability, teaching, and learning about God in Jesus Christ; and (2) focused on building a community of believers who lived as Jesus in the world. Not only did the Methodist movement spread across England and to the Americas, the lives of the people were forever transformed as their hearts were overwhelmed by God's free gift of grace. Their acceptance of this grace spurred them to journey with Jesus as they grew in faith and in love for God and neighbor, thus the journey of "holiness of heart and life." As these early practices are explored and re-visioned, this book discusses the difficulties and joys in the pursuit of "holiness of heart and life" for the author. She also postulates that the church has forgotten the successful practices of the past that could once again be revived to aid in growing mature disciples for Christ. As these old ways and practices are re-visioned for the 21st-century church, this book will thoughtfully provide ideas for their reintroduction that encourages a commitment and a desire to form communities of believers that help one another to grow in faith as they follow Jesus into the world.

A book format was chosen because of its accessibility to nearly all Americans, including clergy and laity, who are interested in the future of the denominational church in America.

### **Artifact Specification**

January 8, 2013

Catherine N. Davis  
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Greetings!

My name is Catherine Davis and I am completing my Doctor of Ministry studies at George Fox Seminary in Portland, Oregon. The road to here has been a very interesting journey! In 1982, I began what I thought was going to be my career as a Speech-Language Pathologist. I continued my education while working, obtaining a MA in the field of Communication Disorders. In 1990, I presented a poster session at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association annual convention in Seattle, Washington. In 1992, I was published in the journal of Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in the Schools as the lead writer of an article concerning the ability of teachers to identify disordered voices in school-aged children. I found myself hooked on research and writing! As I answered the call to ordained ministry within the United Methodist church, I attended seminary and chose to write a thesis (which was not a requirement) and studied the relationship between the language of early Christianity and the ancient cult of Demeter and Persephone. Over the past two years, I have been delving into the formative practices of John Wesley as he founded the Methodist movement. I am proposing to write a book entitled, *The Dance of Heart and Life: One Methodist's Quest to Recover a Practice of Holiness*.

This book is a guide for re-forming some of Wesley's practices, particularly the understanding of "holiness of heart and life," in order to help a denomination in decline re-vision for the future. I believe that the Methodists, with their understanding of God's grace for all of humanity, can offer amazing hope in this uncertain world today. We have lost however, the commitment and discipline that enabled thousands of people to come to know Jesus Christ intimately and to go on to live holy lives loving God and neighbor, as they follow Jesus into their communities, cities, and beyond.

I truly appreciate you taking the time to review my work. I look forward to your honest review. If I can answer any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me via phone or email. Again, thank you for your consideration of my ideas.

Sincerely,

**Title:**           *The Dance of Heart and Life: One Methodist's Quest to Recover a Practice of Holiness*

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**Overview:**    This book is the story of one person's journey to recover the Wesleyan understanding of "holiness of heart and life." While the book provides a brief overview of the historical formative practices of John Wesley that helped to shape the movement of Methodism, the focus is on the pursuit of "holiness of heart and life" while participating in the "means of grace." It is when the early Methodists participated in the "means" that a group of people were formed who were: (1) committed to one another in love for accountability, teaching, and learning about God in Jesus Christ; and (2) focused on building a community of believers who lived as Jesus in the world. Not only did the Methodist movement spread across England and to the Americas, the lives of the people were forever transformed as their hearts were overwhelmed by God's free gift of grace. Their acceptance of this grace spurred them to journey with Jesus as they grew in faith and in love for God and neighbor, thus the journey of "holiness of heart and life." As these early practices are explored and re-visioned, this book discusses the difficulties and joys in the pursuit of "holiness of heart and life" for the author. She also postulates that the church has forgotten the successful practices of the past that could once again be revived to aid in growing mature disciples for Christ. As these old ways and practices are re-visioned for the 21st-century church, this book will thoughtfully provide ideas for their reintroduction that encourages a commitment and a desire to form communities of believers that help one another to grow in faith as they follow Jesus into the world.

**Purpose:**

- to share the personal struggles and joys in the pursuit of "holiness of heart and life" as a follower of Jesus Christ;
- to review and reintroduce the formative practices of John Wesley in discipleship and spiritual formation, and to show their interconnectivity;
- to review the impact these practices had on the early Methodists in faith formation within community;



- to aid the reader in ways to reintroduce Wesley's practices into their contemporary faith community that will encourage renewed commitment and a desire for spiritual formation and discipleship; and
- to aid the reader in "thinking outside the box" as they grapple with questions for discussion in community and participate in transformational exercises that may take them out of their "comfort zone."

**Promotion and Marketing:** This book will best be marketed within the United Methodist denomination. As churches are searching for new ways to aid their people in growing into spiritually mature Christians, this book may serve as a catalyst for understanding in new ways, ideas, and practices found with the Wesleyan tradition. This book can be marketed via Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Cokesbury, the General Board of Discipleship, and other avenues within the United Methodist denomination.

**Competition:**

- *A Blueprint for Discipleship: Wesley's General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living*, Kevin W. Watson, Discipleship Resources, 2009. While focusing on Wesley's General Rules: Do no harm; Do all the good that you can; and Practice the Christian disciplines, Watson aids readers in understanding how to renew these rules for a contemporary world.
- *Bearing Fruit: Ministry with Real Results*, Lovett H. Weems, Jr. and Tom Berlin, Abingdon Press, 2011. In this book, the authors focus the church on changing lives rather than on merely maintaining or surviving.
- *Generation Rising: A Future With Hope for the United Methodist Church*, Andrew C. Thompson, Editor. Abingdon Press, 2011. This book is the compilation of twelve authors who believe passionately in the Wesleyan vision of Christian discipleship and holy community.
- *Grace to Lead: Practicing Leadership in the Wesleyan Tradition*, Kenneth L. Carder and Lacey C. Warner, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2011. These authors postulate that God's grace, working in us and for us, is all that is needed for leadership in the church. They bring both theological and spiritual resources of the Methodist traditions into conversation with current models of leadership.
- *Longing for Spring: A New Vision for Wesleyan Community*, Elaine A Heath and Scott T. Kisker, Cascade Books, 2010. The authors explore a more serious and communal experience of Christianity.
- *Recapturing the Wesley's Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley*, Paul W. Chilcote, InterVarsity Press, 2004. Chilcote provides clear introduction to the faith of the Wesleys and the balance they both found in Christianity between faith and works, Word and Spirit, personal and social, heart and life, and mission and service.
- *The Greatest Story Never Told*, Leonard Sweet, Abingdon Press, 2012. Sweet engages in powerful conversation that calls for a reformation among the Methodist family. This reformation would once again place holy living as a primary practice for all as the church goes forward into the future following Jesus.

- *The Recovery of a Contagious Methodist Movement*, George G. Hunter, III, Abingdon Press, 2011. Hunter explores if the United Methodist church, in its current institutional form, is able to carry out the Great Commission for the transformation of the world.
- *The Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church: Wesley's Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century*, Gregory S. Clapper, Cascade Books, 2010. Wesleyan tradition speaks of “the renewal of the heart” as a vision for Christianity. Clapper explores this tradition with a contemporary understanding of “heart religion” and provides practical applications that make clear the power of “the renewal of the heart” to transform lives.
- *Watching Over One Another in Love: Reclaiming the Wesleyan Rule of Life for the Church's Mission*. Michael G. Cartwright and Andrew D. Kinsey. Wipf & Stock, 2011. This work focuses on engaging the reader with the original texts of the General Rules in a reflective study format.

**Uniqueness:** While other authors often review and discuss some historical Wesleyan practices, they are often timid about discussing their own personal journey as a believer. I plan to delve into my own spiritual journey, with its struggles and joys, as I have personally sought after “holiness of heart and life.” It is my hope that this work will encourage others who have had a similar journey, as well as spur the body of Christ into reexamining the “means of grace” offered by the church to help people grow closer to God and to one another. It is my belief that attempts to separate the quest of “holiness of heart and life” do more harm than benefit to the body of Christ and to the spiritual formation of a community. It is also my hope that a denomination in decline will begin to understand the importance of the relationship between heart and life as mature disciples of Jesus Christ are formed for ministry to the world.

**Endorsements:** Donald Haynes, Leonard Sweet, Dwight Friesen, Bishop Hagiya

**Book Format (non-fiction):** A memoir of personal stories about the journey of holiness of heart and life interspersed with historical Wesleyan practices and teachings. The current state of the church will also be discussed with ideas to re-vision what “church” might look like as holiness of heart and life are once again understood as inseparable in the formation of spiritually mature followers of Christ. Questions for reflection will follow each chapter and will include transformational exercises for the reader’s participation.

**Chapter Outline:**

- Preface
- 1. Invited to the Dance: Led by Grace and Love
- 2. Dance Lessons in Holiness
  - a. Holiness of Heart
  - b. Holiness of Life
  - c. Holiness of Heart and Life: A Dynamic Equilibrium
- 3. The Methodist Dance: Holiness of Heart and Life
- 4. God’s Dance for Us: Means of Grace

5. Dancing Out of Step
  6. Let's Dance!
- Postscript  
Appendix A  
Bibliography

**Intended Readers:**

- Primary: Informed clergy and laity working and serving with the United Methodist Church
- Secondary: Others who may be interested in rethinking Wesleyan practices for the 21st-century church.

**Manuscript:** The manuscript is complete with a word count of 19,414.

**Author Bio:** Catherine Davis has always claimed to be uniquely Methodist. Reared in a United Methodist congregation, she absorbed the Methodist message of love and grace as well as the practices associated with leading a spiritually mature life. She has been a pastor within the United Methodist church for over 12 years, serving primarily small, rural congregations of fewer than 150 members. Her passion has always been to get back to the formative practices that made Methodism unique—its message of grace, forgiveness, and love for neighbor. What she has noticed is that no matter how much public worship people attend, they often lack the commitment and/or are not challenged to go deeper—to grow into a spiritually mature follower of Jesus as they live and work in community and world. Ms. Davis is a visionary thinker and is not afraid to dream out loud. She holds a BS in Speech Pathology, a MA in Communication Disorders and an MA in Theology, and is pursuing a DMin in Semiotics and Future Studies. She has studied under Dr. Leonard Sweet and Dr. Donald W. Haynes, both United Methodist scholars and future thinkers.

**Publishing Credits:**

“Mysteries and Resurrection: A Look at 1 Corinthians 15 in light of the Demeter Cult.” Hood Theological Seminary, Thesis, 2006.

Davis, C. and Harris, T. (1992). *Teacher's Ability to Accurately Identify Disordered Voices*. Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in the Schools, 23, 2, 136-140.

**Future Projects:** Catherine would like to spin a historical fiction story around Paul's sister, mentioned only one time in the book of Acts.

## SECTION SIX:

### POSTSCRIPT

*“God must do something **in** us before God can do something mighty through us.  
—Leonard Sweet<sup>1</sup>*

I realize that as I come to the completion of this work that I have not addressed a couple of key points that need further research and discussion. I’d like to begin discussion now in the hopes that someone will continue the research in these areas. First, how can we reclaim a “movement” mindset when the Church is so deeply entrenched in being an institution? Second, if the world is moving toward a plummeting religious affiliation, how can we who care deeply about “spreading holiness across the land” be the body of Christ in the world, as traditional forms of faith and practice continue to be replaced by those with no religious foundation?

The first question causes me to pause deeply. As a lifelong United Methodist, my heart yearns for an overhauled church. What I mean by this is that I’d like to see the teachings of John Wesley and the traditions of the past re-formed for the 21st century, with a promise to make re-formation and modifications an ongoing process. I am currently a part of a Congregational Leadership Development group this is engaged in trying new ways of spurring on renewal in my local church. One thing I have learned is that Methodists like to plan things. Committees are assigned and the plan is developed until it is ready to be attempted. Often, after the event or program is introduced to the world, many churches are then done—no reflection or assessment of the event or program to see if it met expectations or aided others in faith development. I wonder if this

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<sup>1</sup> Sweet, *11 Genetic Gateways*, 113.

is because we have become so wary of hurting someone's feelings? You know what I mean—Mrs. White spent so much time and energy planning the bazaar that no one would dare point out the things that could be improved upon. Let me ask then, “When did anything we do in loving service to God and others become about us?” The answer here is that, “It isn't about us; it is all about God.” Therefore we should be able to lovingly assess with each other the effectiveness of what has been done. Once the assessment occurs, we should be able to adapt, improve, or even do away with the event or program (or whatever) as we determine if what was done is grounded in the mission of the church. The planning, attempting, assessing, and adapting are circular in nature and enable us to continue to grow together as we discover new ideas and encourage creativity in fulfilling the mission of the church. While each church has a different mission statement, the overall mission for all of us is to glorify God and advance the good news of Jesus Christ in the world. Believers should be working to transform religion into a relationship with Jesus Christ—one person at a time. I recently asked friends of mine to send me the mission statement of their church. Here are some responses:

- To be the family of God, following the way of Jesus, living simply and sacrificially serving our neighborhood.
- Worshipping God, Loving and Serving Others, Sharing the Good News.
- Reaching out to all people with the love of Jesus Christ through our worship, prayer, and action.
- To know Christ and to make him known.
- To be a family of Christians embracing God's love and grace by reaching out to share our faith with all people.
- Transforming religion into a relationship with Jesus Christ one person at a time.
- Sharing the Love of Jesus so All Become His Followers.
- We Gather to Work on our Faith so it Matters

All of these seem to be variations of the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the

Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”<sup>2</sup> and the Great Commandment: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”<sup>3</sup> Is everything we do in the name of the church focused on these missions? Are we assessing, adapting, then improving so that hungry souls are being fed spiritually?

For whatever reasons, the Church appears stuck—a slave to committees, afraid to make changes, and mired in “the way it’s always been done” mud of selfishness and short sightedness. This is not only affecting the local churches within cities, towns, and communities across the U.S., but it is affecting the institutional being that we call “The Church” as well. It seems as if we have lost our sense of what it means to “practice” faith. While committees aren’t bad in and of themselves, everyone in the church needs to fully understand the mission of the church so that all are going in the same direction. It is then, when we dance together, connected to God, with God, and because of God’s grace in our lives, that we move in God’s direction. We are no longer alone on the dance floor but truly the body of Christ in the arms of a loving and gracious God, leading us and guiding us through the Spirit as we become Jesus incarnate in the world.

As I have studied Wesley’s vision and teachings intently over the past three years, I have come to understand him as a man who was not only good at planning and doing, but also proficient at assessing and adapting. Early in Wesley’s life and faith journey, his

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:19-20, Common English Bible.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 22:35-41, Common English Bible.

attention to keeping order and following the established rules prevailed. As he allowed God's grace to transform both heart and life, as he truly began to dance with the Master in the lead, he became motivated to put souls above the ecclesial rules. When he understood that there were people not welcomed in the church, he went to them. Because preachers were scarce, he trained lay people who propelled the movement and worked to "spread holiness throughout the land." After the settling of America had begun, he ordained anyone who would go (a practice not endorsed by his beloved Anglican Church). When there were no men available for ministry, he assigned laywomen the work that needed to be done. When one small group was ready to move into a deeper discovery of the Triune God, he developed classes where they could be nurtured and allowed to practice their faith. Wesley seemed to always be planning, doing, assessing, and then adapting his "methods" of "offering Christ" to every community. How have we gotten so far from these practices? Why are we so afraid of change when change happens every day in every aspect of life? How can we reclaim Wesley's vision and propensity for holy living as we discover more about the Triune God who fills us with grace and love, transforming both our hearts and our lives? I believe the answer lies in allowing God to lead the dance, and our willingness to take responsibility to practice the dance steps with God and with one another.

I also wonder if the world is moving toward plummeting religious affiliations, can we, who care deeply about "spreading holiness across the land," be the body of Christ in the world as traditional forms of faith and practice are replaced by those without a religious foundation? Butler Bass suggests that believers should *prepare* themselves by learning the script of God's story; *practice* rehearsing faith intentionally in ways that

include compassion and justice; *play* (yes, play and have fun) with others as the delight and wonder of God's story are experienced; and fully *participate* in making the changes you want to see, alternating roles and responsibilities with others and joining together in the unfolding of God's story in the world.<sup>4</sup> Leonard Sweet reminds us that, as Methodists, we encourage one another to practice faith, to practice growing closer to God, and to practice a deepening of our identity in Christ, as we become Jesus in the world empowered and animated by the Holy Spirit imaginatively guiding and directing us.<sup>5</sup> Please understand that practice won't be easy. It will require "discipline in our discipleship," "a hope grounded in the promises of God" no matter the condition of the world, and a resolve to "live a dynamic faith with intensity and passion."<sup>6</sup> Yes, living a life that is grounded in the Trinity, visible and productive in the world, and enthusiastic about sharing and being a part of God's narrative, is counter-cultural. Just remember that light bulbs were once criticized too. Now, we find it difficult to live without them lighting up the dark places. When we become Jesus' hands and feet in the world, when we are a living vessel for the power of the Spirit, and when God is our victory in all things, others will hopefully find it difficult to live without the light that illuminates all the dark places in the soul.

We cannot ever go back to the way things used to be. I, for one, am glad. I like my computer and my microwave. As we practice our faith in a world where faith in God appears to be on the decline and viewed as ignorant, where institutions focus on rules and

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<sup>4</sup> Butler Bass, 260-261.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Sweet. *The Greatest Story Never Told: Revive Us Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 114-115.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-109.



not on showing people “the way of salvation,” it will be important to understand that as long as there are followers of Jesus willing to be transformed and then willing to be a part of the transforming of God’s world in love, the dance of heart and life will continue. That is our hope. That is our longing.

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## **Appendix A**

### **The Dance of Heart and Life: One Methodist's Quest to Recover a Practice of Holiness**

By  
Catherine N. Davis

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## Preface

As I write these words, I have recently begun my 13th year in ministry as a pastor, preacher, counselor, administrator, and leader—in other words, a clergy person. From the time I asked Jesus into my heart as a teen at Mr. and Mrs. Lane’s home during a youth meeting, I knew that my life would be one of following the Christ, but it was a long journey toward becoming a clergy person. As a woman in the South, I ran from the call on my life for years. After all, I reasoned, God had to know better than to call a woman to preach in the South! Yet, here I am, 13 years later and still in one piece. There were times, however, when I wondered if I’d make it.

This book is not about the job of being a pastor, preacher, counselor, administrator, leader, or clergy person. It is, however, about *the road that all believers traverse* no matter the particular call in their life. It is about the dance. The dance of life. Especially, the dance of our spiritual lives. While I share stories of my own personal journey as a Christ follower and, consequently, as a clergy person, it is my prayer that my words will be a tool to enable others to draw closer to God both personally and within community.

“We are all called by God according to God’s purpose.”<sup>1</sup> The problem for me was that I found myself often mistaking God’s purpose for my own. Let me explain. I spent much time, both as a clergy person and as a lay person, so caught up in the doing, planning, leading, working, etc., that I chose to leave little time to allow God to form me for God’s use. In our zeal to do what we feel God is calling us to do, we often substitute the doing, the overthinking, the planning, and even the job of ministry, for the practices

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:28, Common English Bible.

necessary for the formation of our spirits as we journey with the Lord. This is not to say that even in the mundane things of job and daily life that God cannot and does not form us or use us. God does. There is a thin line, however, that exists between consciously following our own desires or following in God's will as we participate in allowing God to shape our spirituality.

The legacy left by John Wesley has been a great influence in my life. And yet, somehow along the journey, I shifted my focus from moving to the music of the Spirit to attempting dance moves on my own. I had somehow missed one of Wesley's central teachings: an understanding of holiness of heart and life. Maybe I really didn't miss it, but instead, I never fully understood its ongoing significance, that is, until this season of my life. For Wesley, any believer who came to the realization that their sins were forgiven, and that they did not have to do anything to earn the gift of grace, could not help but want to share that love and grace with others. This was evidenced in how they lived, how they related to others, and how they spent time drawing closer to the God of love. For Wesley, this is what he meant by holiness of both heart and life. It was as if I knew this and believed this, but often was caught up in a struggle to find the balance between what it meant to be holy in both heart and life.

While these Wesleyan practices of spiritual formation are certainly not new to the Methodist tradition, as well as to other Christian faiths, it seems as if the church has disconnected the *heart* from the *life*. That is to say, that decades have been spent proclaiming the need for mission and outreach (holiness of life), often without fully understanding that those ideals cannot be separated from the transformation of the heart (holiness of heart). On the flip side, the transformation of the heart (drawing closer to



God in a deep and abiding relationship with God through the Christ) cannot be separated from holiness of life (going outside of ourselves to serve neighbor, community, and world). Holiness of heart and life exist symbiotically, allowing God's grace to work through us in the world. It is time, yes, now in the 21st century, to reconnect the transformed heart and the transformed life. Souls depend on it.

## Chapter 1

### Invited to the Dance: Led by Grace and Love

*“None of us go into our spiritual maturity completely of our own accord, or by a totally free choice. We are led by Mystery, which religious people rightly call grace.”*  
—Richard Rohr<sup>1</sup>

My earliest recollection of church was in Sunday school at Woodland United Methodist in Woodville, North Carolina. I loved going to church because I felt loved by the people in the church. As I grew, this love came forth in the stories that I was taught. Each Bible story always pointed to God’s love for God’s creation, including us wayward humans. It was always God’s amazing gift of grace that covered us even when, in our sin we messed up, when we questioned our faith, and when we turned away, God still loved us and forgave us. That was the message I received in my hometown church.

It was in this church, among these people, that I was able to ask questions and explore faith. When I was approximately 13 years old, I was invited to play the church piano along with our very skilled organist, Ann. I learned quickly that it was not only acceptable to make mistakes over and over, but that, by practicing, I was learning the skills I would need to draw closer to God. Not only did I practice playing the piano, I also practiced working out my faith. It was here, among a community of love and support, that I was able to practice holy living.

As I grew into my faith, as I asked questions, and as I spent time in relationship with other believers, I began to understand that God had called all God’s children to

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Rohr. *Falling Upward: Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), xvi.

community, and that faith grew in community. One experience that profoundly shaped my spiritual formation was the opportunity I was given to participate in Lay Witness Missions. These were long weekends when a team of folks from my church (and, sometimes, other churches) would be invited to other churches to share our faith in the good news of Jesus Christ. Evangelism, yes, but do not start rolling your eyes. Although the term and the practice of evangelism today often leaves one picturing “sidewalk preachers” or a group handing out tracts on a corner, what went on during these weekends was that we formed relationships with people. We shared our faith. We told others what Jesus meant to us and how following him had changed our lives. We cried, laughed, ate, prayed, and shared with people from all walks of life. I learned that sharing your faith is easy once you have formed a relationship with someone. My faith deepened as it was cultivated and developed in community.

As a teen and young adult, not only was I encouraged to engage in spiritual formation practices that would help deepen my faith, I was shown by example what holiness of heart and life looked like. As we worshiped together, prayed together, worked together, studied together, sang together, and held each other accountable in love for our growth in faith, I witnessed the lives of people change as they grew closer to God and to one another. I remember one man in particular, whose children were about my age. He was the kind of person who would tell it like it is, often sounding gruff and mean. I was afraid of him at times when his short temper would boil over. Throughout the years, I saw his countenance change. He smiled more, he did not sound as gruff, and he participated fully in the life of the church. I witnessed God’s transforming grace working in this man’s life. I saw him exhibit holiness of heart and life as he drew closer to God the

Father, followed in the teachings of Jesus the Son, and was empowered and animated by the Holy Spirit to be in ministry to the world. It sounds almost like a utopia, right? Please don't get me wrong. People fussed and disagreed, as happens in families. I remember one church argument in particular—over the color of the new sanctuary carpet. I sang in the choir so I heard a lot of the “grown-ups” talking and arguing and even gossiping about all that was surrounding this bit of remodeling. As I sat back and listened and watched, I also saw people who vehemently disagreed, yet continued to show deep love for one another. Sure, they may have had to walk away at times, or agree to not talk about it when we gathered for potluck dinners, but love always trumped.

Just as the early Methodist believers had done, the people at my hometown church took seriously the belief that the church was the vessel that extended the “means of grace” to all. Especially, they believed the church was a place that provided spiritual practices that would enable a person to draw even more closely to God. These practices kept the people at Woodland drawing closer to God, through Jesus Christ, and enabled them to experience their faith, to participate in it fully, and to join together with other believers as they lived a life transformed by the Spirit as the hands and feet of Jesus within their communities. For example, I cannot remember a time when I was not encouraged to participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion. I was taught that partaking in the Lord's Supper was a practice of allowing God to forgive, to heal, to love, and to refresh us for God's mission in the world as we are brought even closer to Creator and Savior. As I grew in faith, I looked forward with anticipation to the Sundays when we shared this holy meal. It was, for me, a time of pure grace flowing into my life as I participated in a discipline that enabled me to draw closer to God.

Let me be clear: grace is “the power of the Holy Spirit working in us.”<sup>2</sup> God gives us this grace that works in and through us as we discipline our lives to God, thereby healing us and forming us into what God intends for our lives.<sup>3</sup> In no way can we, by participating in these “means of grace,” or spiritual practices, *earn* God’s grace. God’s grace is a gift to us, working in us, through us, and in spite of us. Participating in these spiritual practices, given as a gift of the church, is in response to what God is already doing in our lives. By encouraging others to participate in these “means of grace” and practices with us, the focus becomes centered on helping people develop a lifelong relationship with God through Jesus Christ and to then experience changed lives, through the Spirit, as they live this relationship within community.

There have also been times that I have turned away from the practices that I knew would draw me closer to God; I let others “cut in.” It was because of the loving, grace-filled lives of others that I learned the importance of continuing to practice with God. When I was a little girl, I remember wanting to dance with my daddy. He was a great dancer and he would let me stand on his feet while he held me in his arms and we moved around the dance floor. As I got older and as he continued to show me the steps I needed to know, I found that I could no longer continue to stand on his feet; however, I did need to remain in his arms. I needed to practice the steps by myself, but if I wanted to really learn to dance, I would need to be in my daddy’s arms. I learned that I needed to be in God’s arms as I danced throughout life as well. I also learned that dancing with God was not an individual act. I am in God’s arms as others join in so that we can work and live

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<sup>2</sup> William H. Willamon. *United Methodist Beliefs: A Brief Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 79.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

out our faith together. Just as the organist had allowed me to practice my piano skills, our music sounded much better when we practiced and played together. Just as the folks in the church had allowed me to practice my faith, our dancing together was more consistent as God continually led us in the pursuit of holiness of heart and life.

This practicing is an ongoing part of the dance that God calls us to with God and with others in the world. The dance becomes a circle dance<sup>4</sup> with dancers holding hands and allowing God to move the circle as a unit. As we dance with God and with others there are no worries about getting the steps ‘right,’ but we are allowed to enjoy God and one another, to fully be in God’s grace, as we supportively move as one body together. While we will all step away from the dance from time to time, all for different and varying reasons, the dance partner is always there with arms open to hold us. We are able to hear God’s music in the voices of those that we are in relationship with, drawing us closer in love, grace, and friendship as we all practice allowing God to lead us in the dance of faith.

It is perhaps because of the discipleship training I received through the love of church members in my formative years that I am a pastor today. I jumped into ministry with both feet, excited, but scared at the same time, to answer God’s call into ministry. I had run from God’s call on my life for many years. “What God would call a woman to preach in the South?” I wondered. “What was God thinking?” I asked. I ran, insisting that I would show God that God really didn’t need me. I retreated into my career as a Speech-Language Pathologist, earning my Master’s Degree and eventually a position on the staff of Appalachian State University, my alma mater. I had my dream job and yet I was very

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<sup>4</sup> Visualize children dancing to “Ring Around the Roses.”

unhappy spiritually. When I finally said “Here I am, send me,” I really had no idea what would happen.

My first assignment (called an “appointment” in Methodism) was to four small churches in the mountains of North Carolina. As the pastor in charge, I was one of the youngest members in all of the churches, and boy, did I have visions of grandeur. I was going to be the one who could do anything! After all, hadn’t God called ME? I never really felt overwhelmed by the job because I was so excited to be in ministry as I lived out my baptism through God’s call in my life. I learned so much in this appointment. I learned quickly that I was on call 24/7, that I had little privacy, and that some people will complain about anything. I also learned that people are generous, loving, and hungering for something in their lives that could help make sense of all the chaos in the world. I watched those four churches pull together to create a community center that housed a computer lab and library. Seniors were given free lessons on how to use a computer. Children were tutored after school. People were seeing God at work in their lives and in the lives of others in the community.

Doors were opened for me to serve in the United Methodist Church and to attend seminary. I exhibited zeal for both as I settled into ministry. I was appointed to a church closer to my seminary and it became my passion to “show” people how to draw closer to God. It was my ambition to be the perfect example. In my eagerness to “show” and “do,” I began to neglect my own spiritual faith formation. I found myself not attending to the “means of grace” extended by the church. I grew further from the God I was called to serve. I grew tired and complacent within the church and in my own spiritual life. I got it in my head that my own faith would continue to grow simply because I was “doing”

God's work. I was so busy "leading" that I forgot that I needed to be led. I was so busy dancing alone that I neglected to let God hold me and teach me. This was not only affecting my work. My marriage was in trouble, my relationship with my grown children was suffering, and I was in my own world—a world of my own brokenness, as I drifted further away from God.

After graduating from seminary, I was appointed to another church in the foothills of North Carolina. Rumors of financial impropriety surfaced at the church within the first two weeks of my arrival. There I was, a driven pastor dancing alone. As a result, my effectiveness as a pastor became clouded. I handled delicate situations poorly and I pushed church members to do what "I" thought was best. I was out on a limb by myself. Not only was I struggling, the spiritual growth of my congregation was struggling as well. My personal life was in shambles. My children were struggling to find their way and my dreams for them to go to college were not in their plans. My husband pulled away and began having an affair that eventually ended our 25-year marriage. Stress abounded in every aspect of my life. And yet, somehow the belief that God had called me to full-time ministry in the church drove me deeper into running away from the spiritual disciplines I so desperately needed. As long as I administered the church and "performed" for the Sunday worship, I thought all would be just fine. How did I get this way?

After much personal pain and heartbreak, with the help of a community that would hold me accountable in love for my ongoing spiritual development, I began to understand once again, as I had when I was growing up at Woodland United Methodist Church, that holiness did not mean perfection. Instead, the quest for holiness of heart and



of life was a process, a dance between my story in the world and God's story for the world, and in particular for me. There was one place, with one group of people, that I was unable to fake my true self, that I was held accountable in love. I had been assigned to a covenant group<sup>5</sup> as a provisional elder candidate and at first felt it was just one more thing to check off of my list of "things to do." We met monthly for three years, and it was during those days that deep and abiding relationships were formed. Those friends (among other close friends in my life) could see the pain that I was in and would not accept my attempts at normalcy. I found myself being held, loved, listened to, cried with, and held accountable for where I was in my own spiritual life. I could be honest that I was unable to sense God's presence. I could be honest that I was angry with God. I could be honest that my life was a mess both spiritually and emotionally. It was with the help of this group and other close friends in the faith that I once again began to engage in the practices, both individual and communal, that would lead me back to the master dancer, God.

I began to realize that I was not a very good dance partner. I forgot about practice, I misstepped all the time, I thought that I could dance on my own, and I allowed other "partners" to cut in. The dance had become about my job as a clergy person and the success I thought that I needed to achieve. These "partners" cutting in were ones of self-centeredness, control, and lack of discipline, and I almost allowed them to destroy me. I did not remain in God's arms as I attempted to dance through the music changes of life

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<sup>5</sup> The purpose of covenant groups is to provide a place for people to agree to build relationships with one another as life stories are shared, to hold each other accountable in love, and to provide support and encouragement as you grow in faith together.

on my own. I had become one of the Methodists that Wesley was talking about when he said:

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.<sup>6</sup>

For too many years I had held tightly to the form of religion and had not allowed *the power* to propel me in my faith. For too many years I was the power, I was the purveyor of all things Methodist and religious, and I followed the ways of the human institution of the church rather than the way of Jesus, the Christ. And yet, somehow I knew, deep down in my soul, that I was always loved. I was always given the opportunity to get back on the dance floor with God in the lead and holding me in God's arms. I was always forgiven. God's amazing grace flooded back into my life through friends, through the love of church folks, through my children, and even through others who were going through similar life experiences. Grace and love: once again leading me, holding me, changing me, and transforming my life as I began to dance with God using the "means of grace" that would draw me closer to God and to others.

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<sup>6</sup>Rupert E. Davies, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 9: The Methodist Societies (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 527.

### **Reflect and Respond**

1. What is your earliest recollection of church? What was the message it conveyed to you?
2. What is your perception of being God's dance partner?
3. Describe your dance with God over the past 10 years.
4. Read Ephesians 2:8. What does this mean to you?
5. Have you ever experienced a time when you knew you were far from God? How was it resolved?
6. Which spiritual disciplines do you "practice?" How have they helped you in your life?
7. How does community make a difference in spiritual growth?
8. How does your church offer "means of grace" for a hurting and thirsty world?
9. What does it mean to "hold someone accountable in love?"
10. What areas of holy living do you need to be allowed to "practice?"

### **Be Transformed**

1. Think about your own faith journey. Sit down with a friend and describe the dance you've experienced.
2. Draw or paint a picture of what the love and grace of God look like to you. Don't be afraid to be abstract and creative as you remember what it feels like for God's love and grace to envelop you.
3. Make a list of things in your life that need to change and resolve, with God's help, to work on them during the month.

## Chapter 2

### Dance Lessons in Holiness

*“To those asking, how do we live, right here, right now?” [Paul’s] answer was always in essence the same: “In a way worthy of God’s infinite love for each of you.”*  
—Sarah Ruden<sup>1</sup>

What did Wesley mean by holiness? Simply this: a process of faith formation whereby one loved both God and neighbor and was a cutting-edge follower of a Christ who imparted this love and its power. He affirmed that the fundamental character of the Christian faith involved both moral and spiritual transformation as one personally fell in love with God through God’s Son, Jesus, the Christ.<sup>2</sup> As one fell in love with God through Jesus, they were changed in such a way that it was evidenced in how they lived their daily lives within community animated by the Spirit. For Wesley, this falling in love was the cornerstone of a deep and abiding relationship with God.<sup>3</sup> He understood Christianity not as a theory or a network of explanations, but as one great promise that brings us to God and re-creates us in God’s image.<sup>4</sup> People do not usually come to faith because of hypothetical evidence but because they have developed a relationship with

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Ruden. *Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011), Kindle loc. 224.

<sup>2</sup> William J. Abraham. *Aldersgate and Athens: John Wesley and the Foundations of Christian Belief* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 34.

<sup>3</sup> I will often use God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—interchangeably. For Wesley, one drew closer to God through Jesus the Christ, empowered by the Spirit. “These three are one.” For more information please see William H. Willamon’s excellent chapter “We Believe in the Triune God,” as found in *United Methodist Beliefs: A Brief Introduction*, 4-12.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham, 13.

someone who loves them unconditionally, or someone who exhibits a life of authentic holiness.<sup>5</sup> Wesley was convinced that a life of holiness is formed and nurtured through growing communion with the Triune God within community.<sup>6</sup> Because of his beliefs, he set out to re-form, re-new, re-imagine, re-think, and re-connect people with the Triune God as they joined with God and with one another in Christian community. These deep and abiding relationships are one of the things that propelled the movement toward holy living that came to be known as Methodism. While I shall soon discuss why I believe holiness of heart and life cannot be separated in the formation of a Christ follower, I would like to now delve a bit further into each particular area of holiness that Wesley understood as necessary for an integrated faith formation. Let's begin with holiness of heart.

### *Holiness of Heart*

“All who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons and daughters. You didn’t receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children. With this Spirit, we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The same Spirit agrees with our spirit, that we are God’s children.”<sup>7</sup> As God’s children, we are invited to develop an intimate relationship, a deep connection to the God of all creation through Jesus, the resurrected Son, as the Spirit draws palpably near to us. This

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>6</sup> Sondra Higgins Matthaëi. *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 12-13.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 8:14-16, Common English Bible.

relationship expands and flourishes as we dance together—with the Triune God and with one another. All who follow Jesus are summoned to this adventure where a relationship with God is established and advanced as we grow closer to God and become disciples of the risen Christ. Our spirits yearn for this closeness and yet we often do not take responsibility for our part in its development. While God loves us as we are and has given us the free will to choose whether or not we will participate in the relationship, when we turn from God, we miss out on the joy and true happiness that comes from this intimate, contiguous relationship with God. We miss out on being transformed into the person that God created us to be. We miss out on our own holiness of heart.

In a sermon entitled “The Circumcision of the Heart,” Wesley gave one of his most careful and complete statements about his understanding of holiness. This sermon, delivered in 1733 at St. Mary’s, Oxford, spells out the theme of the Christian’s participation in God as the essence of Christian existence.<sup>8</sup> Wesley writes,

...that the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ, of one who is in a state of acceptance with God, is not either outward circumcision or baptism, or any other outward form, but a right state of soul—a mind and spirit renewed after the image of him who created it—is one of those important truths that can only be ‘spiritually discerned.’<sup>9</sup>

He goes on to state that holiness in a person is a “habitual state of soul” and involves a heart that is humble as well as full of faith, hope, and charity. These virtues convince the believer that we are not able to help ourselves without the Spirit of God, who makes us

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<sup>8</sup> Albert C. Outler and Richard C. Heitzenrater. *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 23.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

who we are and renews us in all righteousness and holiness.<sup>10</sup> He continues that no one is truly led by the Spirit unless the Spirit “bear witness with his spirit.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, as the Triune God draws closer to us, and we to the Triune God, our very dispositions, way of living, and “all your thoughts, word, and works tend to His glory.”<sup>12</sup>

Have you ever heard anyone say, “I don’t have time to \_\_\_\_\_ (i.e., read my bible, pray, go to church). If I did those things I would never get anything else done!” Martin Luther was to have exclaimed that if he didn’t pray at least four hours a day, he would not be able to get any of his work done.<sup>13</sup> Holiness of heart is not something we are able to gain on our own. It is a state of our very soul that requires surrender and discipline. Surrender to God’s work in our life so that we can give up control, so that we can give up those things/practices that keep us from God, and so that we can begin to exhibit and experience a heart full of trust and hope; trust and hope residing fully in God, Son, and Spirit, and not in ourselves. Surrender changes us by transforming our hearts and souls as we are molded into who we were created to be. While Wesley knew the value of a personal, heart-changing relationship with the living God, he understood the benefit gained in practicing certain spiritual exercises that would draw us closer to God and aid in the transformation of our hearts.<sup>14</sup> The discipline of prayer is one way that we can draw closer to God as we speak and as we listen. Participating in worship services as

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>13</sup> Rob Weber, *Reconnecting: A Wesleyan Guide for the Renewal of Our Congregation, Participant’s Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 50.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 54.

we are engaged by the liturgy, the music, and/or the reading of scripture are other “means” that strengthen our relationship with the Triune God. As we surrender and as we participate in disciplines that draw us closer to God, we become transformed into new creatures with hearts bursting with grace and love for God and for others. As our hearts are transformed, our lives will follow.

### Holiness of Life

All who respond to Christ’s invitation onto the dance floor are called to be disciples. “In first-century Palestine, the word *disciple* didn’t mean what it means today. It did not refer to a pupil in school who learned from notebook to notebook via a credentialed teacher. Rather, it meant apprentice. A disciple was someone who learned a skill or way of life from a teacher. With respect to Jesus, a disciple was a *follower*—not just of a set of teaching but of an entire way of living.”<sup>15</sup> Jesus followers, disciples, are invited to not only learn an entire way of living, but to join him in the world as others are introduced and invited to live in this “way.” As we join Jesus’ whirling life force, as we follow him along the “way,” a company of new followers will join in, close relationships will be formed, and followers will be invested in each other’s lives as they become aligned with Christ and at one with God.<sup>16</sup> Being a disciple *is* our close relationship with God. In other words, we were not meant to be alone on the journey. As we participate

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<sup>15</sup> Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus: A Theography* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 130.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard Sweet. *I Am A Follower: The, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012) Kindle loc. 361.



with other followers, as we become “one body” in Christ Jesus, as our story becomes Jesus’ story, we become disciples “baptized in the Spirit with the grace of his resurrection life.”<sup>17</sup> It is as disciples, as followers of Jesus, that we begin to understand that our story *is* God’s story and that God’s story *is* our story. It is as we journey and dance with the Triune God that our lives are transformed in such a way that we cannot contain the story any longer, and we begin to live differently, act differently, think differently, and so on, as the God of all creation continues to do resurrection work within us. As we grow and change, others will want to know what is going on in our lives. It is then that we have an opportunity to “make disciples”—as we share God’s story and our story, as we demonstrate what a disciple looks like, as we mentor and exhibit both learning and following, and as we dance with God together in community.

Disciples have a responsibility and the desire to allow God to work in their lives, to join Jesus in the world, and to draw closer to God and to one another. When these primary spiritual formation habits cease, the body of Christ becomes disjointed and being disciples (let alone making disciples), becomes difficult. Author Jerry Bridges gives us a good analogy:

A farmer plows his field, sows the seed, and fertilizes and cultivates—all the while knowing that in the final analysis he is utterly dependent on forces outside of himself. He knows he cannot cause the seed to germinate, nor can he produce the rain and sunshine for growing and harvesting the crop. For a successful harvest, he is dependent on these things from God.

*Yet, the farmer knows that unless he diligently pursues his responsibilities to plow, plant, fertilize, and cultivate, he cannot expect a harvest at the end of the season. In a sense he is in a partnership with God, and he will reap its benefits only when he has fulfilled his own responsibilities [emphasis mine].*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Kindle Location 368.

<sup>18</sup> Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1978), 13.

Being a disciple is a joint venture, as is being in a relationship, as is dancing. We cannot do what God must do, and God will not do what we should do.<sup>19</sup> Each follower of Jesus has responsibility for their own *discipleship*, their own *spiritual formation*, as these things do not happen magically just because we love God or follow certain rules. God will, through God's grace, provide all that we need for this growth and transformation. As we begin to draw closer to God in one area of life, God will reveal another area that may need work. Both discipleship and spiritual formation (which can be used interchangeably here) are a process, a journey, an adventure, and a dance that allow us to pursue both holiness of heart and life as we draw closer to God and to one another.

While our individual and communal lives are difficult to separate and most of us realize that we cannot exist in isolation, it is important to realize that we can and often do discover God when we get outside of ourselves. Alan Hirsch calls this, "acting our way into a new way of thinking."<sup>20</sup> While many believers today are focused on "thinking their way into a new way of acting," Hirsch believes that God is often discovered if we act first (serving others) and think later (discover why we were moved to act). Specifically, if we change our behaviors, our thinking will follow. The early Methodist believers understood this as well. They ministered to people who had been denied God because of their social status, people who were consumed with alcohol and violence in their lives, and people who had never been prayed with or loved as a child of God. The early Methodist believers changed their own behaviors and ways of thinking as they offered Christ to everyone regardless of social standing or spiritual development. Wesley energetically

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>20</sup> Alan Hirsch and Darryn Artclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 66.

organized the people so that, although they may not have been mature believers, they would have opportunity to act first and discover more about God along the way, as God worked through them to help change others' behaviors and lives. They engaged in sharing daily the tools they themselves were using to pursue holiness of heart and life. They shared their stories, their understanding of God's love and grace for all, and offered others the "means of grace" that would allow them to discover God both individually and within community.

These first Methodist believers were organized by Wesley so that they not only depended on one another for encouragement, forgiveness, and accountability, but additionally, that they were supported by each other when allowing God to work through their actions outside of their faith community. People would come and be a part of the Methodist congregation (called The Society) and then move into classes developed to enable them to grow closer to God and to one another. As they developed deep and abiding relationships with others, they went side by side into the places that religion had overlooked. These actions, led by the God of love and grace, were evidence of their spiritual formation and growth as they served God's purpose of love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness for others. There was not only heart transformation but also life transformation as they allowed God, the master dancer, to lead them in all aspects of their daily lives. Because they drew closer to God and to others, sharing their faith and the good news of God's grace, all were able to experience God's power and love in various ways. Wesley's organization of the people called Methodists was multifaceted and allowed believers in all stages of spiritual formation to discover more about God, themselves, and others.

*Holiness of heart and of life: a dynamic equilibrium*

Today, in churches all over the world, there are those who come each and every time the doors are opened; there are those who participate in every church program or activity; there are those who lead within church committees and boards; and yet, they are not Christians—those who follow in the way of Christ. In Wesley’s sermon “The Almost Christian,” he writes that some “have the form of godliness—the outside of a real Christian,” doing good, suffering for others, avoiding evil thoughts and actions, as well as attending to the “means of grace”—those disciplines or tools extended by the church as “means” of drawing us closer to God’s grace already working within our lives. Yet they were—and Wesley confesses that this was where he once was himself—an Almost Christian. What is the difference then between being an “Almost Christian” and “altogether a Christian?”<sup>21</sup> For Wesley the difference is summed up as:

- A humble love of God and others;
- Abiding in God and God abiding in you;
- Loving neighbor as yourself; including enemies;
- Seeking not one’s own good, but the good of others so that they might be saved;
- Having a faith that brings forth repentance, a right living faith;
- Exhibiting trust and confidence in God, as revealed through Jesus Christ and in Scriptures through the Spirit;
- A sincere desire to please God in all things;
- The love of God radiating extensively in your heart by the Spirit as you work out your faith in love.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, an “Altogether Christian” has these qualities centered in the foundation of God’s love and forgiveness for them and for all of humanity, no matter their

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<sup>21</sup> Outler and Heitzenrater. 65.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 61-68.

circumstance. The Christian life is one of balance between holiness of heart and life.<sup>23</sup> God offers us grace freely, before we are even aware of God working in our lives. As we utilize the disciplines and tools given as a gift for all by the church, to bring us closer to God and to others, we begin to understand that God loves us, even us. Once we begin to grasp God's love and grace given to us, we begin to realize that we have a responsibility to discipline our lives so that we can fully live in that love and grace given freely and undeservedly; so that we can more fully share this love and grace as God works in and through us to do good for God and neighbor.<sup>24</sup> "Our faith is not first a matter of what we believe; it is a matter of something God has done."<sup>25</sup> Our response to what God has done is made visible in us as we draw closer to God both in heart—participating regularly in the sacraments, studying scripture, prayer, worship with others, and growing deeper in our daily relationship with God; and in life—demonstrating the grace and love of God and their power to change people's lives, as we care for the sick, feed the poor, and are compassionate and kind toward all. There is a balance here between heart and life. This balance includes God's free gift of grace to us, especially in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and our response to God's work in our lives as we turn from sin and grow closer to God and others, witnessing daily to all God has done and continues to do.

I have often struggled to find the balance between holiness of heart and of life. For me, the struggle begins when the heart and the life become disconnected. It is easier when I can just stand on God's feet to dance, like I did with my daddy. This, however, is

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<sup>23</sup> Matthaevi, 25.

<sup>24</sup> Willamon, 72-89.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 74.

not truly dancing. It may allow me to practice the moves with the one who is leading, but as I have stated before, dancing is much more than just knowing the moves. God desires for us to *participate* in the dance with God. Sure, God will hold us up and will move us through the motions, but in my experience I have found that most of us do not continue to practice this type of dancing for very long. It is as if we know intuitively that there is more for us. Hopefully, we begin to boldly step off of those “daddy feet,” allowing God to lead us as we fall into God’s arms and begin to move as one with God. The reality is that many choose instead to go and practice alone. In my own life, as I discover that I want and need to dance on my own two feet (still with God holding and leading me), I am at first so excited that as we practice together, I find myself moving in God’s direction. I become involved in lots of ministry as I continue to practice those spiritual disciplines that help me to grow in faith. Then, for whatever reason, I begin to truly want to show others how to dance, but with *me* in the lead. *I* can show them. *I* can teach them. Just follow *me* and you will find God. I believe that I know the dance so well that I have it memorized. All I need to do, then, is to teach the steps to others so that they too will memorize the steps and know God. Unfortunately, when I step out onto that dance floor without God, I drop every ball that I have been trying to juggle. First, I drop my own spiritual practices and become focused on the task rather than on the stories that are unfolding in the lives and ministry God has connected me to. I work the crowd and end up exhausted and less than the witness that I intend to be. Yes, I appear to be living a holy life, but my holy heart is empty. I have discovered that it is impossible to live a holy life unless my heart is holy as well. Both heart and life must be symbiotically joined.

## **Reflect and Respond**

1. What does the name “Christian” mean to you?
2. Think about the first time you fell in love. How is this like/unlike “falling in love with God through Jesus Christ?”
3. Who do you think of when you think of someone exhibiting “holy living” what does that life look like in the world?
4. Hebrews 12:10 in the Common English Bible reads: “Our human parents disciplined us for a little while, as it seemed best to them, but God does it for our benefit so that we can share his holiness.” How would you explain what it means to “share his holiness?”
5. What does an “intimate relationship with God” look like? Is that the same as a “deep abiding relationship with God?”
6. Do you feel like a disciple of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?
7. If grace is ours through faith alone, why then do we need to assume any responsibility for our spiritual growth? Why does community matter?
8. What do “discipleship” and “spiritual formation” mean to you and how are they involved in dancing with God?

## **Be Transformed**

1. Write a poem that expresses your understanding of a relationship with God.
2. Design a worship space in your home or place of work using objects or pictures that invite you to holy living.
3. As you read the newspaper or surf the web, be aware when you discover an article that demonstrates the imbalance between heart and life. Reflect on this.

## Chapter 3

### The Methodist Dance: Holiness of Heart and of Life

*“As the more holy we are upon the earth the more happy we must be (seeing there is an inseparable connection between holiness and happiness).”*  
—John Wesley<sup>1</sup>

I love Star Trek. I cannot remember a time when I did not. I watched the Original Series, the Next Generation, Deep Space Nine, Voyager, Enterprise, and have never missed one of the feature films. One of my favorite characters from Deep Space Nine was a Trill named Dax. Trill were an alien race depicted as comprising a humanoid host, and a worm-shaped symbiont<sup>2</sup> that was implanted in the host's abdomen. Their personalities were a combination of the host and symbiont, with the symbiont's memories providing continuity between hosts.<sup>3</sup> While I realize that I may have lost some of you here, please bear with me. It wasn't until I saw this alien involvement that I finally understood a symbiotic relationship. I know that I had this word explained and taught to me in eighth grade science class, but until experiencing it in a fictional alien television show, I did not fully grasp its meaning. Symbiosis is from ancient Greek: σύν "together" and βίωσις "living." For Dax, it was more than a mutual living together. Her symbiont had been living for hundreds or thousands of years and passed all the memories of previous hosts

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<sup>1</sup> *The Works of John Wesley*, begun as “The Oxford Edition of the Works of John Wesley” (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975-1983), continued as “The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley” (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), volume II, 431.

<sup>2</sup> Symbiont – an organism living in the state of symbiosis.

<sup>3</sup> “Trill (Star Trek),” in Wikipedia (accessed 20 August 2012, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trill\\_\(Star\\_Trek\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trill_(Star_Trek))).



on to her. Without her, the symbiont would die. Without the symbiont, Dax would die. They were joined in a way that was life-giving for them both.

Spiritual formation is a term often used to describe the development of a person's relationship to the totality of life. In today's world, it generally has little to do with the Christian tradition. On the other hand, Christian spiritual formation is understood as a partnership of both God's and humanity's actions.<sup>4</sup> Matthaedi defines Christian faith formation as:

A participation in God's work of inviting persons to relationship with God, self, others, and creation. Faith formation instills Christian values and beliefs and also guides the development of a Christian lifestyle so that each person might respond in faith to God's prevenient grace. The process of faith formation nurtures Christian identity and vocation in disciples who are called to do God's work in the world. This occurs through participation in the life of the church and sharing responsibilities for teaching, leading, caring, and serving, as we learn what it means to be a Christian.<sup>5</sup>

This seems to be what Wesley meant when he called this process of faith formation "holiness of heart and life," which he also simply defined as "loving God and neighbor." Holiness of heart focuses on gaining a deeper relationship with God by participating in acts of devotion to God.<sup>6</sup> Holiness of life focuses on participating in acts of kindness and compassion toward others.<sup>7</sup> Wesley believed the church's responsibility was to nurture

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<sup>4</sup> Matthaedi., 20.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 26.

and support believers as they responded to the urgings of the Holy Spirit for their ongoing faith growth and journey.<sup>8</sup>

My friend, Jeri Brown, told me about learning to dance. She learned to dance at a very early age because her mom was always dancing and she began to imitate her mom. As she got older, Jeri took dance lessons and began to learn Scandinavian dances. This type of folk dancing was learned in order that she might perform with other dancers at the annual Scandinavian Festival held in Junction City, Oregon. Jeri, and the other dancers, practiced each week in a building that could be used as the town hall, a dance studio, and even the library. Scandinavian folk dances are generally done in couples and contain steps that are often a mirror image of one another. Jeri told me that practice often involved rotating partners, as there were usually more girls than boys at the lessons. When they weren't practicing together at the "studio," Jeri's teacher would instruct them to go to their homes and practice. Jeri found this was very difficult because from the first day, girls were instructed to always follow their partner (usually a male, and called "the lead"). At home, Jeri found practicing the dances difficult because "the lead" wasn't there to practice with her. She told me, "I couldn't follow myself!" Jeri even said that practicing alone was boring. It seemed that she truly needed a place where she and a partner, as well as a community, could help her to learn and even excel at dancing. As a part of the community of faith, we too need a place where we, and our partner, can practice, where we can join together with community, and where we can learn as one, as we begin to excel at the dance of faith.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 28.

Jeri was also taught to follow “the lead” no matter what. Even if they were off of the musical beat, follow them. If not, then both dancers would get off beat and off balance, thus reducing the confidence that they needed for a good performance together. In my own life, I cannot count how many times that I have not followed God, my “lead,” resulting in a dance that was off beat and out of balance. I learned, just as Jeri did in learning her dances, that when I did not follow “the lead,” my confidence in God and others was negatively affected and that dancing alone became very difficult. In my struggles to balance both heart and life and even to remain God’s dance partner, I continue to be drawn to God’s dance, where there is always an invitation to continue to practice. There is a lesson here for all believers. God invites us to dance and promises that we can remain in God’s arms as we seek to follow God’s musical beat for our lives. It is here, as we dance with God, that we can experience a spiritually balanced life dance. However, as we pull away from our “lead,” as we leave God’s arms, or as we begin to anticipate God’s next moves, our faith becomes unbalanced. The good news is that God is always on the dance floor, ready for us to begin again, forgiving our missteps, and granting us pardon when we do not dance to God’s beat. God’s studio, the church, is the place where we can join with God and others to practice holiness of heart and life.

Wesley understood the church, God’s dance studio, as the vessel that offered all people the “means of grace.” Some people believe that this sounds a bit pretentious—as if we can only experience God’s grace within the institution of the church. I do not think that this was Wesley’s intent. He understood that both, however, were linked. He understood that the church and the tools/practices/disciplines needed to fully experience God’s grace in all of life were joined in a way that is life-giving for both. Just as a dancer

needs a place to practice their dance, so too does a believer need a place to practice their faith. Yet we do not practice alone. God’s grace, given to each of us individually and freely, is, however, thoroughly cultivated within believers as they practice faith together. The studio, or church for Wesley, was the perfect place to hold “practices.” Remember, you go to a dance studio not because you already know how to dance, but because you need to learn, to practice, to make mistakes, and to be encouraged to try again. It is only as we practice with others, pick each other up, show each other new moves we have learned, and learn together to follow “the lead,” that we begin to understand that our complicated life that is often out of balance can, by God’s grace, achieve both a heart and life balanced in holiness.

The spiritual practices that Wesley was so passionate about engaging his people in were tools that would help them achieve the balance of heart and life working together. Over the years, Wesley’s list of tools or ways to express God’s grace working in our lives has had additional disciplines added to it. Here is what Wesley considered to be the “means of grace” that would enable one to fully live holiness of heart and life:

Works of Piety or Devotion to God (any service focused on being transformed by God):

- individual prayer
- fasting
- searching the scriptures
- healthy living
- public worship
- the communal practices of Holy Communion, baptism, and Christian community (conferencing/fellowship).

Works of Mercy or Compassion and Kindness (any service focused toward sharing God’s grace and addressing the individual needs of others):

- doing good

- visiting the sick
- visiting the imprisoned
- feeding and clothing those in need
- as well as service focused toward communal/societal needs, such as, the seeking of justice.

Other spiritual disciplines that have been added over the years include but are not limited to:

- journaling as a way of personal reflection
- fasting as a way of going without something that either takes our focus off of God or as a way of bringing our focus back to God
- Sabbath time, which is time set aside to rest in God’s presence and provision
- silence, which involves not speaking and quieting our minds with God and with others as we practice listening
- management of money as we begin to use less for our own needs and more for others
- sacrifice, as you begin stretching yourself to take time for others, rather than for yourself
- confession to others as you are accountable to those who will encourage you, love you, forgive you, and be your spiritual allies
- witnessing, which involves you sharing your God story with another and allowing them to share their story. This is not a forcing of your beliefs onto someone but a mutual respect and love for the other wherever they are.
- encouraging, which involves using words and actions to lift others up as they receive the blessings of love and acceptance and as they experience first-hand the grace that has taken over your life.

Participation in these disciplines takes our minds off of ourselves and focuses us instead on God and on others. Just as Jeri learned to dance by following “the lead,” we too must focus not only on how we are dancing, but, more importantly, on where God is leading us. These disciplines or practices, while not ends in themselves, allow us to be formed as a people who stay in the arms of the Dance Partner. Keep in mind that individual practices must be combined with communal practices and vice versa. They are inextricably inseparable.

The early Methodists understood that their holiness, growing in God’s grace and becoming conformed to the “mind of Christ,” was to be lived out in community and in

caring for those in need, while lovingly holding one another accountable for “bearing fruit.” This was the definition of balanced holy living. Fellow believers were to “watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation”<sup>9</sup> as they trusted one another with the things in life that tempted them, the temptations they succumbed to, the condition of their spiritual life, and how and where the Spirit was leading them as they practiced their faith in community. This “watching over one another in love” also included accepting the love, forgiveness, and encouragement of their sisters and brothers in Christ. Wesley believed that when people worked together to keep each other accountable in this positive way, the world would be a better place; a place where God’s love lived in the hearts of all humankind with the byproduct being healthy, spiritually growing communities of compassion and caring for all of God’s creation. Those first Methodists appeared to understand that God had sent them into the world to proclaim God’s love to all and that they needed one another to accomplish this task.

As I have previously stated, I experienced divorce. I have never been able to use an adjective that would adequately describe divorce other than “bad”; any type of broken trust, any type of deception, or any type of a broken relationship is “bad.” Church problems, family brokenness, and financial problems overwhelmed me at every turn. However, it wasn’t until I began to lean on others, to share my story with those who cared for me, to allow others to hold me emotionally, that I was able to begin to feel balanced again. Something inside of me knew that I had stepped away from the Master Dancer. Something inside of me knew that I was out of step – with God and with others.

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<sup>9</sup> D. Michael Henderson. *John Wesley’s Class Meetings: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 84.

It was through these life-to-life connections that I was once again able to surrender to God and to allow God to hold me in God's arms.

That is what the joining of heart and life meant for Wesley, and it means the same for me. They both need each other to fully live. They are joined not only physically, but mentally and emotionally as well, passing on years of faith tradition, scripture interpretation, revelation from God, experience about relationships and stories, and wisdom to be able to use all of that in the present. Without holiness of heart, your spiritual life suffers. Without holiness of life, your spiritual heart suffers. Both need to be fully present in our lives in a balanced, life giving way in order to grow closer to God and to one another.

## **Reflect and Respond**

1. How would you explain “spiritual disciplines” or “means of grace” to a new believer?
2. Is “accountability in love” important in your life? Why or why not?
3. Wesley believed that when people worked together to keep each other accountable in this positive way, the world would be a better place. Do you believe this? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever experienced a struggle to find a balance between holiness of heart and life? Explain.
5. What happens when you try to dance by yourself?
6. Why do you think that “disciplines” are often uncomfortable for us and is there anything we can do to make them more enjoyable, even fun? Give examples.
7. 1 Corinthians 9:25 states: “Everyone who competes practices self-discipline in everything. The runners do this to get a crown of leaves that shrivel up and die, but we do it to receive a crown that never dies.” Is self-discipline a form of spiritual discipline? Why or why not?
8. How is your church like/not like a dance studio?
9. How can spiritual disciplines help us in our daily living? How?
10. What happens to you when you separate holiness of heart from holiness of life?

## **Be Transformed**

1. Sit with friends over a meal and discuss how God’s grace works in your lives.
2. Resolve to practice one spiritual discipline that you are uncomfortable with in both of Wesley’s categories (Works of Devotion and Works of Kindness and Compassion) this week. Invite others to join you.
3. Visit a dance studio. Make notes on what happens there and share your experiences with your church. Discuss ways the church can be like a dance studio as it helps people experience God’s grace and dance toward a life of holiness.



## Chapter 4

### God's Dance for Us: Means of Grace

*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.'*

—1 Peter 1:13-16 NRSV

I find myself often in shock that while I have experienced God's grace over and over in my life, I sometimes find myself out of step. The only way that I can explain it is like the Apostle Paul said in his letter to the Romans, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."<sup>1</sup> I do not believe that this is a problem specific to only me, or to Paul, as the struggle appears to be within us all, even *after* we have experienced and participated in God's love and grace for our lives. This seems to be why Wesley was so passionate about having all Methodist believers engage in spiritual disciplines and not only individually, but in community as well. I find that when I utilize the "means of grace" I remain in step with God, balanced, and dancing joyfully, as I fully live in God's love and grace.

I suppose that this struggle is a part of the human condition. We begin to believe that we have the power to do all things on our own. We begin to believe that we no longer need those silly practices as they are for people who are immature in their faith. We begin to believe that we can fight evil, that we can save the world, or that we can move mountains—all without God. Yes, the human spirit is very strong willed. And yet,

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 7:15, Common English Bible.

God created us like this. I have wondered for years just what God was thinking when God created a humanity that was so good at running away from their creator. I have concluded that God did not create puppet servants and that God gave us choice. With that God-given freedom of choice, we made choices that were often detrimental as we learned to hate and destroy. We often put rules above love and we turned away from God, the one who was continually inviting us to the Holy Dance. I don't need to go through the struggles God's children have had over the centuries. Rules to keep us in line didn't work. Even sending God's Son to earth to show us how to live, to teach us how to be in relationships with God and others, was not viewed as a success. So God chose to do one more thing for us—God's stubborn, but precious, human creation. God chose to defeat sin and death through Jesus so that anyone who calls on his name may come to the dance. Not only can we *attend* the dance, we can participate *in* the dance. I believe that God knew we could never really understand His invitation to participate in the dance of love and grace, but because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection from the dead, we are now forever promised full access to the Dance Studio. Because God, the Master Dancer, is abundantly loving, forgiving, and full of mercy and grace, we are given the opportunity to participate and practice dancing—right *now*—as we live in this creative relationship with God and with others. For me, that is truly the good news! As all of God's children dance with one another, when we grow slack or misstep (and we will) in our responsibility to practice dancing with God and with neighbor, there will only be grace, love, mercy, and forgiveness offered to us.

Methodist congregations all over America continue to be places where the “means of grace” are offered to a broken and hurting world. While these churches may not be

organized into groups in the same way that Wesley did it in the 18th century, the intent of the groups remains close to the same. Thousands meet as a whole congregation at least weekly for worship and praise together. Classes are held at least weekly in which scriptures are studied, questions raised, conversations held, and relationships with others are built. Small groups exist that enable people to grow even deeper in love and grace as their motives and emotional states are addressed. Mature believers take on the responsibility to demonstrate what it looks like to dance as a believer. They also model the teachings of Methodism in the ways that they live and conduct the life of the church. Present at many churches each week are people who are not committed to active membership but still desire to overcome their personal struggles, and they are cared for, prayed for, and encouraged to grow spiritually in faith by the rest of the body. I see this exhibited at Junction City United Methodist, my current appointment, where church ministry is divided among the body of believers, not solely the responsibility of the appointed clergy. Most everyone understands that they have a responsibility for discipleship and aiding in spiritual growth among the body. Just as Wesley believed that God's grace is essentially present and active in all believers, and that each believer must practice receiving and sharing this grace in all aspects of their lives, so too do the Methodists at the small church in Junction City, Oregon, as in many other places in the world.

This work of participating in the "means of grace," of practicing our faith through spiritual disciplines, and of "acting our way into new ways of thinking"<sup>2</sup> is often difficult, just as when we attempt to learn a dance by ourselves. I can honestly say that there are

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<sup>2</sup> Hirsch and Artclass, 66.

some spiritual disciplines that I just do not like to do. I am often uncomfortable offering compassion to criminals as I struggle to see Jesus in them. I find journaling tedious, as rehashing my insecurities and worries often doesn't seem to be helping me to grow. Both are good examples of me trying to dance without God as "the lead." I looked up the word "discipline" and the definitions that I found at [Dictionary.com](http://Dictionary.com) did not sound particularly exciting or very comfortable:

- an activity or exercise that develops or improves a skill;
- punishment inflicted by way of training or correction;
- the rigor or training effect of experience or adversity;
- behavior in accord with rules of conduct;
- behavior and order maintained by training and control.

Sounds kind of like having to go to the gym each day in order to have a strong body, or having to watch what I eat in order to be healthy, or having to watch the speedometer in my car so that I don't get a ticket. These are things I do not because they are comfortable or exciting, but because I know that if I do them my life will be improved in some way (although I often do not *want* to participate in them). I have the choice and the responsibility for my life, both the spiritual and physical dance, and therefore I must put effort into both. This is an ongoing part of the dance, of the human struggle.

In my own life, the disciplines that I have used have often depended on the season of my life at the time. For example, when I was living in my world of pain and brokenness I found that journaling (yes, the thing I really dislike doing) was a profound way for me to express myself and reflect on my life. At other times I have found fasting to be helpful. During the Lenten season last year, I gave up Hollywood. I had not even realized how much I was addicted to who Justin Timberlake was last seen with or who was wearing what on the red carpet. That addiction was keeping me from drawing closer

to God. For six weeks, I gave up any articles, television shows, tweets, and Facebook posts concerning anything to do with Hollywood gossip. I still avoid this behavior that draws me away from God, although I must confess it is often difficult. Additionally, while I have always been drawn to serving others, I have had to be careful in my zeal for this behavioral discipline. Not because there are people out there that will take advantage of me, and there are; and not because there is a good chance that I would give away my right arm, and there is; but because in the doing, I sometimes forget the partnership between heart (inner or personal spirituality) and life (outward expressions of the former, demonstrated in actions). In other words, the serving becomes my fix, my drug of choice, and I forget that it is about God and not me. Wesley writes, “Remember also to use all means *as means*; as ordained, not for their own sake, but in order to the renewal of your soul in righteousness and true holiness.”<sup>3</sup> When I allow God to lead our dance, when I use the “means of grace” to draw me closer to God, when I allow God’s love to flow through me, and when I allow the love of God to “in all things be glorified through Christ Jesus,” then my actions will in no way be about myself. God’s love, flowing through my heart, will enable me to give God all the glory for everything that God does through me.

All of humankind is infected with a corrupt nature that has taken us far from God’s righteousness. We are unable to turn from this nature back to God on our own. No matter what we do, no matter how many good works we perform, no matter how pleasant and acceptable those works are to God, we have no power on our own to restore our righteousness. Only by God’s grace, only by the merit of the Savior Jesus Christ, only by our faith in grace alone can we be made right before God. It is often easy for us to begin

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<sup>3</sup> Outler and Hitzentrater, 170. From Wesley’s sermon “The Means of Grace.”

to believe that if we “do” these things, these spiritual disciplines, that all will be well. That is not the point of participating in the “means of grace.” We participate not only to experience our own renewal, forgiveness, comfort, and strength, but also as an outward expression of God’s grace and love for us. This outward expression, as we participate in the “means of grace,” strengthens and confirms our faith in God.<sup>4</sup>

While there are many “means” that channel God’s grace into our lives, I’d like to illustrate two that most Christian churches repeatedly offer today. Baptism and Holy Communion are sacraments of the church (i.e., services, traditions, rites) with visible influence. They are not ceremonies that someone performs or does for us, but are means “whereby God does for us and performs gracious work in us.”<sup>5</sup> William H. Willimon states in his book, *United Methodist Beliefs: A Brief Introduction*:

In these activities, God is busy acting upon us, placing something in our empty hands, enlivening our cold hearts, enabling us to be transformed in ways that we could never be on our own.<sup>6</sup>

I have experienced such joy as I participate with God in these sacraments. I am able to fully experience God’s grace as I participate in dancing with God and with others.

As a pastor, I had the privilege of baptizing a father, mother, and daughter at the same service. In that one act of participation in God’s grace for them, they truly began their lifelong dance with Jesus. That day, God’s grace gave rise to their new lives as they symbolically died to self and rose in Christ, confessed their faith, and became a part of God’s family. In baptizing infants, I have seen parents and congregations take seriously

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<sup>4</sup> See the General Rules in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), 103.

<sup>5</sup> Willimon, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

their responsibility to introduce spiritual practices to a child, to be accountable to them for discipleship and spiritual formation, and to renew the covenant made at their own baptism as God continues to work through them and they continue to dance with Jesus. No matter our age or our expertise in theology or biblical studies, the sacrament of baptism reminds all of us that we all need God's grace to make it.<sup>7</sup>

Another visible agency whereby God's grace is conveyed upon us is the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. Wesley believed that this sacrament was to be celebrated often as a blessing for us of God's grace. While participating in the Lord's Supper does not save one from sin or make one holy, one's participation indicates a "desire for an increase of the grace of God."<sup>8</sup> Wesley wrote in his sermon "The Means of Grace:"

Is not the eating of that bread, and the drinking of that cup, the outward, visible means whereby God conveys into our souls all that spiritual grace, that righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, which were purchased by the body of Christ once broken and the blood of Christ once shed for us? Let all, therefore, who truly desire the grace of God, eat of that bread and drink of that cup.<sup>9</sup>

Recently, I discovered that a 90-year-old man in my congregation had never received Communion. All throughout his life he had been denied the opportunity to dance with God. All he had ever heard in church was that he was unworthy of this sacrament. While he had desired God's grace for many years, he knew that his life had not always been pleasing to God. He had turned, with God's help, from his old ways of living and had come to understand God's love and grace especially for him. Do you remember the movie "Dirty Dancing?" In it, Baby, who had never been very good at anything, finally

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>8</sup> Outler and Hitzenrater, 165.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

found something that she loved, and yet she had to sneak around to learn it. In last scene, as Baby dances beautifully and passionately with her partner, the tears of love and pride in her father's eyes said everything. The first time this 90-year-old man held out his hands and received bread and then dipped into the cup, he had tears in his eyes and so did I. It was a powerful moment of God's grace being poured upon him and all who were witnesses. Participating in these sacraments brings the focus of our lives back to the God of all creation. Our humble act of receiving and experiencing God's grace through them takes the focus off of our individual dance and puts it back on the daily dance with God as we are held in God's arms. We are reminded each time that we participate in these sacraments, as well as other "means" that channel God's grace to us, that life is not about us—it is all about God.

The "means of grace" taught by Wesley as disciplines for holy living that conveyed God's grace to us were not only individual in nature, but communal as well. "The means into which different men are led, and in which they find the blessing of God, are varied, transposed, and combined together with a thousand different ways."<sup>10</sup> We participate in these "means" as ways to draw closer to God, experience fully God's grace poured upon us, and to "renew our souls in righteousness and holiness."<sup>11</sup> None of these "means" have power in themselves; but by the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we yearn to draw closer to our Creator, to participate in the ordinances of God, and to tend to the state of our souls. We can do none of these "means" without the guidance of the Spirit

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 170.



as we give ourselves fully to God's Dance, fluidly moving with God as one in the world  
as we become His expression of love and grace.

## **Reflect and Respond**

1. List the “means of grace” that you engage in the most. Now list the ones you would like to add. Pray that you will draw closer to God through new disciplines.
2. Describe some ways that Jesus danced on earth.
3. Is there a difference between engaging in spiritual disciplines and in just living a good, moral life?
4. How does community figure into your faith formation? What kind of dance does that look like to you?
5. When the Apostle Paul was in chains in a Roman prison, he wrote to the church in Philippi that, “what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel.” How can our physical and spiritual dance “serve to advance the gospel?”
6. 1 John 3:18 states, “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” How do spiritual disciplines enable us to act in “truth?”
7. What are some things that draw you away from God? What do you need to do to continue to dance in God’s arms?

## **Be Transformed**

1. Spend time each day in silence with God. Start out with 3-5 minutes and increase to 10-20 minutes. Record your emotions, feelings, and anything about your life that changes or doesn’t change.
2. Think about a way you can help your church community participate fully in all of Wesley’s “means of grace.” Talk with your pastor or worship leader about your ideas and how you can get involved.
3. Form a “Faith Accountability Group.” Study and pray together weekly if possible. Express unconditional love and grace as you practice dancing together.

## Chapter 5

### Dancing Out of Step

*“We live in a time of momentous historical change that is both exhilarating and frightening. Christianity itself is becoming something different from what it was.”*  
—Diana Butler Bass<sup>1</sup>

One group shouts, “Burn the Koran!” while another screams, “Kill all fags!” and still another slams their door shut to any who look, speak, or have cultures different from theirs. Still others participate together in a Flash Mob of Love at Pride Charlotte joining with straight Christians offering a Str8apology and handing out “Gay + Christian = OK” stickers.<sup>2</sup> The one thing they have in common—all proclaim to be Christians. The Church is a people, and yet the church as an institution also struggles in the Dance of the Holy. Denominational doctrines and theological interpretations have often separated Christians from one another, rather than bringing them together as followers of Christ. This institutional misstep has resulted in disillusioned followers and others who want nothing to do with Christianity or the hypocrisy that is seemingly so prevalent. It is sad that our culture seems to clearly equate hypocrite, rather than holy, when the word “Christian” is heard. Somewhere the Church has made several wrong dance moves and the Wesleyan idea of holy living has become very distorted. This has led to a culture full of people who are tired of the institutional hypocrisy, many of whom who have followed down the path

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<sup>1</sup> Diana Butler Bass. *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Pride Charlotte was held in Charlotte, North Carolina. Find out more about Str8apology at <http://str8apology.com>.

toward an individualistic, therapeutic, private, and inner-directed faith.<sup>3</sup> Religion has not been, as Wesley wrote, “grounded on the eternal fitness of things, on the intrinsic excellence of virtue, and the beauty of actions flowing from it.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, heart transformation has become disconnected from the transformed life. Marcus Borg, in chapter one of *The Emerging Christian Way*, believes that the culture of the current church, what he calls “The Belief-Centered Paradigm,” must change in order for the disillusioned to once again embrace Christianity.<sup>5</sup> He advocates instead for a “Transformation-Centered Paradigm.” This paradigm recognizes that the Christian life is not a set of beliefs, but *is* a relationship with God; a relationship that transforms us as we dance with Him and are enthusiastically involved in God’s world [emphasis mine].<sup>6</sup> This sounds very Wesleyan indeed, as the heart is engaged with a life of action and life is engaged with a heart of devotion for the Triune God. The Church is called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, to teach it, and to lead a people transformed by this good news into the dance of holiness.

Andrew C. Thompson reminds us that it was during the mid-19th century that Methodism began to move away from *transformational practices* (i.e., small group accountability, living according to the Methodist Rules of Life,<sup>7</sup> practicing the “means of grace”) to *informational practices* (i.e., Sunday school, belief-centered, knowledge- and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>4</sup> Outler and Hitzenrater, 29.

<sup>5</sup> Marcus Borg, *The Emerging Way: Thoughts, Stories, and Wisdom for a Faith of Transformation*, ed. Michael Schwartztruber (British Columbia: Copperhouse, 2006), 12.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>7</sup> *The Book of Discipline*, 103.

instruction-based). Thompson states, “Before the appropriation of Sunday school, Methodists were taught how to *practice* their faith individually and together as a community. Once Sunday school became the norm, Methodists were taught *about* their faith [emphasis mine].”<sup>8</sup> For a century and a half, Methodist believers in particular have often elevated learning *about* faith over *practicing* faith. This idea that transformational practice can be separated from informational practice would have seemed contrary to Wesley. He understood the gospel of Jesus Christ as transformative as well as informative. Life for Christians is a life lived dancing in the Spirit each and every day through all tasks. Life for a Christian is holistic, involving all of ourselves in the world in which we live. This life cannot be separated into segments, such as spiritual or secular. “If the primary relationships of our church members lie in their relationship to the church en masse rather than in life-on-life connections with one another, then we have missed the sweet spot.”<sup>9</sup> I think Wesley would have agreed. It is certainly within this “sweet spot” that we engage in a deep and abiding relationship with God through Jesus Christ as the Spirit guides and informs all of life. At the same time, as we dance with the Trinity, God is revealed to us in our relationships with others. Our lives, and the lives of those we join in the dance, improve as we study together, minister together, encourage one another, and hold each other accountable in love to live a life of holiness.

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew C. Thompson, editor, *Generation Rising: A Future with Hope for the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 58.

<sup>9</sup> Sweet, *I Am a Follower*, Kindle loc. 1544.

Consider with me now Hill Valley United Methodist Church,<sup>10</sup> which is located in a rural farming community. Career opportunities have become increasingly difficult here and many families have moved from the area. The congregation is made up of people who have worshiped in this church for generations. It is not uncommon to hear stories of “the good old days” when attendance neared 300 each Sunday, when people drove horses and buggies for miles just to come to church, and when camp meetings were held each summer and hundreds were “saved.” Now, they are blessed to have 15 regular attendees, most over 60 years old. The church building, built in the 1800s, has no running water on site or bathroom facilities. The congregation seems to be in a “let’s just exist” mode. They are, however, a very loving people who seem to be great at nurturing one another. If someone is sick within the church family or community, they are the first to take in meals or provide whatever help they can. Everyone knows everyone else in this small community and neighbors generally help neighbors when the need arises. Their compassion for the physical needs of those they know and love is outstanding. They love their neighbor, but it seems to be an act of friendship, duty, tradition, or common decency. They do not seem to be connecting these loving actions with their faith development. It is as if they are unaware that God’s story *is* their story and they are not connecting this ability to lovingly nurture others as a part of their own faith and spiritual development. While there may be a cognitive understanding of God, there does not appear to be a heart understanding and so God is “kept” within the walls of the church building and the dance they are a part of on Sunday never really becomes a relational part of their daily lives. They are dancing alone, unbalanced in holiness of heart and life.

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<sup>10</sup> The name of this church is completely fictional.

Why? Perhaps it is that they too are disillusioned. Perhaps the institution of the church as a whole has perpetuated their complacency of belief and behavior. Perhaps they have not experienced the joy of dancing with God.

Many people appear to have become satisfied with one hour per week of “spiritual development.” For several years, the idea that one hour a week in worship is sufficient has been, in part, reinforced by the institutional church. Just as people become content with purchasing gym memberships that are debited from their bank accounts monthly, and then not going to the gym, this same type of “contentment” follows some in the spiritual dance of life. Emphasis has been placed across denominations on “reaching” the lost by getting them to come into a “meaningful” worship service at any church building. Perhaps when people showed up for the service but were not encouraged to take advantage of the “exercise equipment,” they became content with letting others “exercise” for them. It has become the job of the pastor as the “sage on the stage” to impart spiritual wisdom during a 20-minute sermon in such a way that outsiders will want to know Christ more fully. While numerous congregations like Hill Valley demonstrate the ability to take care of one another, there appears to be something that is missing from their lives. Worship often becomes “duty” instead of “joy.” Bible study, at a time other than Sunday, becomes just one more thing to schedule in an already full life. Visiting the sick...well, isn't that the pastor's job? Congregations regularly state that they want to grow in numbers (more people in the pews), but hardly ever mention the spiritual growth of the people that currently attend. It is as if churches have been given permission to settle for less than they want or need; permission granted by the Church, the denominations, the church leaders, and even pastors to continue with “Christianity Lite.”

Although I'm not sure when Christians got the message that it was ok to live this way, it is clear that we have become bad dance partners. It is clear that we have been dancing alone for too long. Churches have gotten so out of balance that they do not appear to understand the Wesleyan idea of an integrated faith formation that moves one beyond self into the world as God's grace is received and shared. There is often little cohesive rhythm between the daily life of a believer and their relationship with the Triune God. Holiness of heart and life become separated and segregated into "things I do for my spiritual life" and "things I do for my secular life."

This holistic relationship with God was what Wesley called the "*via salutis*" or "Way of Salvation."<sup>11</sup> This "Way" was a spiritual pilgrimage made possible by the gift of God's grace given along the journey and accepted by the believer through faith, made complete in love of God and neighbor.<sup>12</sup> The essential foundation of salvation for Wesley lay in the character of God, which is love.<sup>13</sup> This was different from other thoughts of his day that insisted that the foundation of salvation was the depravity of the sinner, their repentance, and the inability of the believer to ever resist God's love and grace. Although Wesley believed that all are indeed sinners estranged from God, he taught that humanity hears the music of God's Spirit calling them to a dance of love. God's love, like a parental love, is self-limiting. This allows for our "human liberty" (free will). Humanity is able to resist or turn from God's grace. While God's grace calls all to dance, faith is

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<sup>11</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 178.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Haynes., 9.



our response, if we so choose.<sup>14</sup> Faith is our R.S.V.P. not only to the dance, but to a lifetime membership to the Dance Studio.

Wesley used the metaphor of a porch on a house to explain his theology: when we stand upon the porch, but do not yet enter into the house, we experience God's grace that is asking us, wooing us, and calling us to let God into all of our lives (the house). We then may choose to go to the front door and stand at the threshold with the God of love. This is our awareness that God loves us and that God will remove our sin, will remove the guilt, and will lead us into a new life. If we then enter into the house, accepting Jesus Christ as our savior, repenting of our sin, and earnestly seeking a new life, God then asks to enter the rooms. Each room is an unlocking of the stuff of life—things that might be painful for us, things that God's love and grace will help us deal with. As we journey (or dance) through the rooms, we seek God's will in every room of the house (our lives) and begin to grow, both in holiness of heart and life. Wesley called this "grace upon grace" being poured into our lives.<sup>15</sup>

It is often assumed that all church-goers have already asked Jesus into their hearts and because they are participating in Christian activities they are then growing in their faith. This is an erroneous assumption. Kennon L. Callahan, in his book *Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys* writes, "...it is precisely because so many churches continue to believe and act as though this is a church culture that we have so many stable and declining and dying churches as we do."<sup>16</sup> We live in a religiously and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 23-24.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 10, and from class notes with Dr. Haynes.

culturally diverse world. Many adults no longer want to be told what to believe, but rather want to be allowed to safely, and without judgment, explore religion and faith so they can look for a way to make sense of the chaos of the world around them and find a meaningful way of existing in this world within a loving community. It is no longer enough to only provide programs and activities for engaging in community or mission and hoping that a new generation of Christians will be formed.

In the spring of 2011, an electronic survey, designed to determine which practices of discipleship and spiritual/faith formation were being observed in churches, was conducted among United Methodist clergy across America.<sup>17</sup> It appears, even from the limited results of the survey (only 72 churches responded, although it was sent to many Conferences in the U.S.), that some United Methodists believe that they are indeed engaged in practices of discipleship and spiritual formation. Many discipleship opportunities, however, appeared instructional/teacher-student in nature. Although clergy were involved in leading small groups, it was encouraging to see that congregation members were also very involved in the facilitation of them as well. Another interesting observation was that clergy and laity, while participating in the “means of grace,” appear to have become comfortable in the particular “means” that they participate in most of the time (prayer, searching the scriptures, and public worship were the top three reported for both clergy and laity participation). This may be reflective of the overall comfortableness

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<sup>16</sup> Kennon L. Callahan, *Effective Church Leadership: Building on the Twelve Keys* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1990), 14.

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix A for a copy of the survey and the overall results.

of many churches as they continue to minister in ways that may not be speaking to the 21st-century adult.

Churches all over the U.S. have, for years, been out of step while attempting to dance with the Master Dancer. Many have made wrong dance moves or stepped away from “the lead” Dancer. The pursuit of holiness of heart and life has often been replaced by: routines, performances, mission experiences, attractional church models, and the need to maintain the church institution at all costs. Twenty years ago, Mack Stokes defined “Vital Christianity” as the grace of God dwelling within the hearts of people.<sup>18</sup> The early Methodists also believed it was God’s grace that made them holy as they journeyed with God and allowed it to take over their lives. It seems as if the church has substituted many of the formative spiritual disciplines that were important to the early Methodist believers with programs and activities aimed solely at increasing knowledge about God and scripture or in only meeting the immediate physical needs of others. While these activities are usually aimed at helping people learn more about God and experience the Christian faith outside of themselves through routine activities, there is often little time made for dancing activities that connect us to God and one another. Activities that invite such connection include: conversations about faith, sharing of thoughts, discussions of God, and intentional relationship building among participants, or with those they are engaged in ministering to.

These ideas of staying in balance with God, of living fully in God’s grace, of leading people to a relationship with God and with others, and of lives transformed into holy living have become fragmented and/or separated. Let me give an example. At the

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<sup>18</sup>Mack B. Stokes, *Major United Methodist Beliefs* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 20.

church I currently serve, they host a free breakfast for the community once a month. During this breakfast, they serve up a hot meal of ham, pancakes, eggs, cereal, fruit and beverages. An average of 45 people come to the church on the last Saturday of each month to partake of this free breakfast. The volunteers (usually about 6) do a wonderful job of preparing and serving the meal. The participants seat themselves at tables where their “group” is isolated unto themselves. The volunteers often eat isolated from the participants as well. It is as if they have been invited to the dance, and instead of participating fully, they have become the wall-flowers who sit on the side because they do not have a partner. The name of the meal is “Just Breakfast” and it is my understanding that it was named this because no witnessing or proselytizing was allowed. I get it, really I do. They are not the type of church to force beliefs down anyone’s throat. They want people of all faith backgrounds and traditions to feel welcomed. While this is all good, the problem here is that spiritual formation and discipleship are not happening—for either the volunteers or the participants. We must do more than offer physical food. We must “offer them Christ”<sup>19</sup> and invite them to the dance. This happens when our lives are so full of God’s grace that we cannot contain it. This happens when talking about God is as easy as talking about the weather. This happens when, in every aspect of our lives, we are enveloped in God’s love and grace for us and we are not afraid to proclaim the music of God’s love and share the dance of God’s grace with everyone we meet. It rarely happens when we try to convert people or when we set our focus on recruiting people to our way of thinking. The Church has focused so much on doing,

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<sup>19</sup> Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, vol. 1 (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1838), 191. This book is no longer in copyright and has been digitized by Google from the library of the New York Public Library and uploaded to the Internet by user tpb. Available at <http://archive.org/details/ahistorymethodi01banggoog>. Accessed December 13, 2012.

learning, thinking, and/or recruiting that believers have not been given opportunities to practice dancing by sharing their faith in love.

It is as if Methodists in particular have forgotten about their roots as a movement fueled by the transformation of the heart and life together – the symbiosis. So many people have become unbalanced as they have concentrated on either heart or life, thus missing out on all the joy and blessings that come when we completely become “new creations” in Christ Jesus. Just as Wesley’s ideas were extremely creative and imaginative for the times that he lived in, the ideas for these times should be as well. Wesley’s goal was to make disciples who not only knew who God was in their heart (inner or personal spirituality), but knew God in such a way that it changed their lives (outward expressions of the former, demonstrated in actions). The practices in discipleship and spiritual formation promoted by Wesley fostered communion with the Triune God in Christian community, equipped believers to follow Jesus into the world as they were transformed by God’s love and grace working in their lives, and enabled them to live Christ-centered, incarnational lives. As the Church embraces the directive to “make disciples for the transformation of the world,” previous practices in spiritual or faith formation can and should be renewed in ways that speak to the hearts of people in today’s world. Ideas for re-newing and re-forming some of these practices are included in the next chapter.

The catch phrase with the United Methodist denomination at this moment is “Vital Congregations.” There are workshops and learning opportunities for both laity and clergy to participate in as they learn to be and to lead vital congregations. A “Vital Congregation” is defined as:

- Inviting and inspiring worship;
- Engaged disciples in mission and outreach;
- Gifted, equipped and empowered by leadership;
- Effective, equipped and inspired clergy leadership;
- Small groups and strong children's programs and youth ministry; and
- Numerical growth over time, engaging more people in ministry, and people more generous in giving to mission.<sup>20</sup>

While these characteristics are broad and open to interpretation, one cannot help but wonder where the dance moves of discipleship and spiritual formation fit in. Do we experience faith formation in our worship dance practices? Is it something that should grow from engaging in the dance of mission and outreach? As we discover our spiritual gifts and are empowered by leadership, will this draw us closer to God and to one another? Does spiritual/faith formation play a role in what an effective, equipped, inspired clergy leader looks like? Do small groups and programs invite an intentional discipleship element and call believers to dance together? If a church increases in numbers of people in the pews, more people engaged in ministry, and people giving more to mission does that mean the people's faith and spirit are being formed so that they begin to live incarnationally in the world sharing their faith with others? The answer to all of these questions is, hopefully, yes. If one looks at the status of most of the United Methodist churches across America, however, the answer to many of these questions may be "perhaps" or even "no." It seems as if many people continue to believe that spiritual formation and discipleship happen magically as people get involved in church. It is possible that as United Methodists attempt to define "Vital Congregations," they could

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<sup>20</sup> Barbara Dunlap-Berg, *Vital Churches Share Common Characteristics* (available online at UMC.org), August 8, 2011.

lead one to believe that intentional discipleship and spiritual formation, essential dance moves for faith, may be optional.

The Church already has what is necessary for “Vital Congregations”—the good news of God’s free grace, through Jesus Christ, offered to all who believe. Methodism already has defined spiritual practices (dance moves) that in the past were used to help instill this life-changing news within the hearts of men and women from all walks of life. We need no other stimulants for vitality. There are no great secrets for church growth. Growth and life come when hearts are changed and people begin to live their lives in ways that bring love and grace to others. It is time that the people called Methodist revive the Wesleyan practices of discipleship and spiritual formation in such a way that others will understand the importance of progressing in faith. It is time that the people called Methodist R.S.V.P. to the Master Dancer and begin to learn the tried-and-true dance moves of our faith tradition. It is time that the people called Methodist join together on the dance floor, assisting one another and others, in learning the move of our Partner as we grow in our faith. Our very doctrines shout for us to once again place the dance of both heart and life at the forefront of growth—both personally and communally. It is time to once again place importance on our participation in the “means of grace” as channels of God’s grace and love working enthusiastically in our lives and in the lives of the people we connect with. It is time to become balanced again as we learn to dance as one with God in holy living that involves both transformation of heart and life.

### **Reflect and Respond**

1. Reflect on how your life is often divided into “spiritual” and “secular.” Discuss with other believers ways that these areas can be part of the same dance.
2. How is Wesley’s understanding of the “Way of Salvation” similar or different to what you have been taught or heard proclaimed in other faith traditions?
3. Think about the community you are a part of. Discuss whether or not you believe your community to be a “churched culture” and why.
4. What are some things, besides listening to inspiring sermons or teaching, which might “stir the heart?”
5. How have you become “comfortable” in your faith? What has that done or not done to your spiritual dancing?
6. Share your ideas about what you think a “Vital Congregation” looks like.
7. Wesley believed that God is constantly inviting us to the dance. At what times in your life have you felt or understood this to be true for you? When has it not seemed to be true?
8. What are your thoughts on how the church can use the practices of the past to speak to a believer today?

### **Be Transformed**

1. Read Diana Butler Bass’ book *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: HarperOne, 2012) with a small group and discuss together.
2. With a group, make a list of ideas of how your church can help people grow in “holiness of heart and life” together as they join in the Dance.
3. Talk to people of other faith traditions about this idea of a transformed heart and life that are central to the Methodist tradition. Note any similarities or differences between faith traditions. If possible, discuss ways each faith tradition is involved in teaching others to “draw closer to God and neighbor.” Can other faiths join in the dance with God?



## Chapter 6

### Let's Dance!

*“Life has never been about just ‘getting in.’ It’s about thriving in God’s good world. It’s stillness, peace, and that feeling of your soul being at rest, while at the same time it’s about asking things, learning things, creating things, and sharing it all with others who are finding the same kind of joy in the same good world.”*

—Rob Bell<sup>1</sup>

Why does holy living matter? The simple answer—we were created by God to be in relationship with God and with others. This is such a simple concept, and yet it has been made so complex. Scripture demonstrates to us how God calls us to a relationship with the Triune God and with others. The first half of the Ten Commandments given to Moses for the Israelite people is about maintaining a right relationship with God; the second half is about maintaining a right relationship with others. Scripture stories and lessons continue to proclaim the importance of the relationship that we have with God and with others. It is as if all of the ancient writers of scripture understood the beauty of dancing in harmony with the God of creation as they joined together on the dance floor of life. Just as dancing is meant to be done with a partner, so too is our life—partnered with God and with others as we grow in holiness of heart and life.

In one of Wesley’s earliest sermons, “The Image of God,” given while he was a tutor at Lincoln College in 1730, he states that humanity is called to reflect back, like a mirror, the love it receives from God. God’s image is not something that is imprinted

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Bell. *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., HarperCollins ebooks, 2011) Kindle loc. 2156.

upon humanity, but “is an ongoing relation in which humanity receives and gives.”<sup>2</sup> This brings to my mind the picture of two dancers. My friend Jeri, who has danced all of her life, gave me a short lesson in the essentials of dancing. She told me that when the dance is face-to-face, the “follower” generally mirrors the “lead’s” footwork. As partners work together to create complementary movements, the “lead” is mostly responsible for initiating movement and the “follower” is responsible for maintaining this movement. I asked her how she was able to know the intent of the “lead” and she said that in addition to verbal conversation between partners, there are nonverbal cues provided as they each uniquely contribute to the style and mood of the dance. Sometimes, however, even the most experienced dancers miscommunicate. Jeri said that when that happens, one should never stop dancing or the “whole thing will become a mess.”

Time and time again, I have been privileged to witness when someone begins to understand that *they* have been called into a viable and vibrant relationship with God that will continue throughout their life. Holy living matters because without this relationship, this partnership, we are not totally complete, satisfied, or fulfilled. It is as if we dance alone. As Christ followers, we are called to mirror to others God’s dance moves of love and grace. As we follow Jesus into the world, dancing with the “Lead,” we become Jesus’ feet and hands, thoroughly engaged in the dance conversation and in mirroring the steps for everyone we come into contact with. It is impossible for us to complete the dance that Jesus calls us to unless we are allowing God’s grace to dwell deeply within our hearts and lives. The quest of holiness of heart and life is the lifeline that prepares us, equips us, and

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<sup>2</sup> Theodore Runyon, “Holiness as the Renewal of the Image of God in the Individual and Society,” in *Embodied Holiness: Toward a Corporate Theology of Spiritual Growth*, eds. Samuel M. Powell and Michael E. Lodahl (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 80.

sends us into the world. When miscommunications occur, or when we step away from the dance on our own, we would be wise to follow Jeri's advice to never stop dancing. As we once again surrender to the cues of the Lead Dancer we will, with God's help, continue to dance in the uniqueness of God's love and grace.

Consider with me this story from the gospel of Mark, chapter 6. Jesus and his disciples were traveling through the surrounding villages of his hometown. He divided the disciples up into pairs and sent them out with the authority to cast out unclean spirits and heal people. "So they went out and proclaimed that people should change their hearts and lives."<sup>4</sup> When they returned to Jesus, they could not wait to excitedly tell him all that they had done and taught. Can you imagine the lives that were transformed? Can you imagine how many, for the first time, came to understand God's amazing grace and love for them as they began to dance with the Lord? I remember one woman in one of my congregations who finally came to understand this. She and her husband lived below the poverty line and spent much of their money on cigarettes and alcohol. She came to church every Sunday, however, seemingly eager to hear the gospel. She and I had many conversations over coffee at the local diner. I watched as this child of God changed before my eyes. She became a light to her community, opening up a thrift store. She started helping people in the neighborhood. If any were in need, they knew they could go to her and she would help them or get them the help they needed. Her life changed as she pursued holiness of both heart and life and as she partnered with God in the Holy Dance. Shortly before I left this church, she was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. We continued our conversations and she continued to grow in faith and love, sharing God's

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<sup>4</sup> Mark 6:12, Common English Bible.

grace with her community. She died within six months of her diagnosis. At her memorial service, people from all over that community stood and gave witness to the person that God had transformed her into. Because she lived out her faith in community, not only was she transformed in heart and life, the community was as well. She had to come to understand that God had sent her, even her, an invitation to His dance. Once she began to allow God to “lead,” once she allowed God to communicate with her in such a way that she realized that her ideas, suggestions, and creativity became a part of the dance moves, she couldn’t wait to mirror God’s moves of love and grace to those in her community. Her life’s dance truly reflected God’s image of forgiveness, love, mercy, and grace.

John Wesley believed that it was possible, because of God’s grace, that all of sinful humanity could get better, could grow in God’s grace, and even be perfected in love.<sup>5</sup> That is why Wesley was so adamant about partaking of the “means of grace.” These tools, he believed, would help people to grow, to be perfected, and then lives would be changed and the world would be a better place to live. While this did involve the transformation of the individual, it was permanently linked to the transformation of the community. Community is where you live your growing faith. Community is where the fruits of your faith are made visible. Community is also where you get support, encouragement, and even accountability for your spiritual formation. This faith, worked out in community, not only promotes personal growth, but also equips and mobilizes us for service and mission to the world.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Willamon. 84.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 95.

Why is any of this significant in today's culture and world? Let me answer by stating why holy living, which includes loving God and neighbor (holiness of heart and life), matters to me. First, let me be clear. Holy living cannot be accomplished on your own. It is precisely when you begin to dance alone, without allowing God to lead, that disconnect occurs between truly living and just performing. That's not to say that God doesn't work through us and through our performances. God has absolutely worked through all that I have done and continue to do in life even when all of my attempts to dance have not included God; but I do not believe that is the fullness of life we were created to participate in. From my experiences, God has created us with a yearning to draw closer to God and with a yearning for the joy that comes from this relationship. That is to say, God created us to *want* to dance in partnership with God. Humanity was also created with choice and I have often chosen to dance on my own. It was during those times that my living was not what I believe to be holy. Holy has little to do with obeying certain rules. Holy living is about allowing God to work God's love in us so that this love is recognizable in how we love others. As we strive to live mature lives of faith, God's work in us will be demonstrated through our love of God in Jesus Christ and in how we treat other people.<sup>7</sup>

As I danced into the spiritual formation of my youth, I was embraced by a community of believers that allowed me to practice my faith, supported and encouraged me, and equipped and mobilized me for ministry in the world. As I entered the world of adulthood, however, away from this community, life was not always as nurturing. I

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 85.

became disconnected and was not allowing God, as the “lead,” to communicate with me. I did not practice the disciplines (or dance steps) I needed so I could be the dancer God had called me to be. I did not listen to God, and therefore I doubted and questioned why I was doing what I was doing with my life. As I often danced alone, I stunted my relationship with family, friends, and others as I barreled out onto the dance floor in charge of my life. My Dance Partner lovingly waited for me to return, and yet I turned from the One I was trying to live for and dance with. Much of what I did “in service to God” was stress-filled, self-centered, and had little to do with what God wanted from me or for me. The fact that I wasn’t taking responsibility for my spiritual formation disconnected me from really living life the way God had intended me to live. I was spiritually unbalanced as I danced alone.

God works through community and others as they are enabled to share God’s grace and love that is living within them. Because people mirrored God’s grace and love to me, I was able to find my way back. In a world where relationships are often formed via the internet, this spiritual connection through face-to-face relationships with one another is vitally important. We need others to help us as we learn to dance toward a holy heart and life. We need one another so we can keep connected with God in a way that represents the symbiosis of the relationship between heart and life. As we allow the Master Dancer to lead our lives in love, as we continue to follow His “lead,” we will be less likely to isolate ourselves from the others we need to truly be connected to all forms of dancing. Holiness of heart and life requires relationships—with God and with others.

This endeavor to a holiness of both heart and life, to be connected in relationship to both God and humanity, is appealing to many believers today. What does not seem to

appeal to them is more individualism, inward-focused institutions, and a faith that tells them how and what to believe. The 21st-century believer craves discussions and conversations about things that matter—to be allowed to question and even doubt. They must be allowed to participate and interact with their faith and others as they discover God’s love and grace at work in the world. The Church must begin to flex their creative muscles as they offer dance studios where faith can grow and people can learn God’s dance moves of love and grace. Perhaps then, the spiritual disciplines that Wesley was so passionate about advancing among the early Methodist believers could be re-formed and re-imagined in ways that encouraged all people to R.S.V.P. to the dance, where they could grow in holy living.

As the body of Christ begins to realize that they cannot grow spiritually in isolation, as they come to understand that disciples are made within relationships, and as they comprehend that it can no longer be business as usual within the church, the re-formation of spiritual disciplines may begin to occur naturally as spiritually hungry people want to live a fuller life in harmony with the God of creation. This living into relationships with God and with others is why I believe the renewal of spiritual disciplines and practices is of great importance in the world today. The Church, while often promoting that congregations “become missional,” would be wise to remember that this is only one part of spiritual formation in living a life of holiness. The heart must be engaged as well. The ultimate way to commission the heart is to “offer them Christ”<sup>8</sup> so

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<sup>8</sup> Bangs, 191. <http://archive.org/details/ahistorymethodi01banggoog> (accessed December 13, 2012).

as God's love and grace through Jesus Christ abounds within hearts, both heart and life will be involved, inseparable in the dance of holy living.

Over the past few years, I have had the privilege of getting to know people across the country that are committed to holy living as they draw closer to God and neighbor in love. I'd like to share with you some examples of folks who are engaged in the intentional pursuit of holiness of heart and of life in many ways.

Springwater Community of Faith, Portland, Oregon:

The Springwater Community of Faith, in Portland, Oregon, appears to understand this need for the engagement of both heart and life as they covenant together in an intentional community. The members of this community have committed to Wesley's understanding of holiness of heart and life; simply, loving the Lord your God with everything, and loving your neighbor as yourself. They meet regularly in small groups of 3 to 4 adults called "TIL-ing (Together in Love) Groups. These groups encompass not only study and prayer together, but they offer a place of unconditional love and grace as they are each called to accountability for the way they live their lives and grow in faith. This intentionally created space of love and grace allows participants to dance with God. Dancers are given the opportunity to practice the steps and mirror the dance moves in their community as their faith grows. One group member said, "My group helps me connect to God and others on a heart level." This community also practices communal living, which allows them to intentionally practice loving reconciliation regularly as they live together and many families become one. Each member of the community agrees to participate in spiritual formation practices within each household, although they do find difficulty setting aside time for this due to work schedules. The process requires



discipline and responsibility, both personally and as a household, as they endeavor to grow together in faith and dance the dance of the Holy.

The entire community meets together weekly with an organized, shared ownership of planning and leading worship. They take turns facilitating worship participation as they observe different faith practices, always including weekly participation in Holy Communion. This faith community is also very active within the community of Lents, in Southeast Portland, where they live. They are intentional about meeting and forming lasting relationships with neighbors, even if those neighbors are not a part of a faith community. They plan and participate in a “mission/outreach” event within the community each month. These events could be as simple as raking the yards of their neighbors or as complex as collecting items and giving them out during the holidays. They spend intentional time on retreat together yearly as they renew themselves spiritually together as a community. Is this faith community perfect? No, but they appear to be moving toward Christian perfection, as Wesley would encourage,<sup>9</sup> as they intentionally participate in spiritual faith formation disciplines with passion and commitment and grow in the love of God through Jesus, the Christ. This community seems to intentionally be striving to stay in the dance while following the Master Dancer.

Emerging Church Meet-Up Group, Charlotte, North Carolina:

This unique group is opened to all people and is held monthly in a coffee shop. The purpose is to provide a space for people to question, to search, to vent, to proclaim, to encourage, and to experience unconditional love and acceptance. While they are not a

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<sup>9</sup> Outler and Heitzenrater, 69-84.

church in the traditional sense, they are working together and intentionally developing relationships with others as they all participate in spiritual faith formation. Participants are encouraged to come with an open mind and heart as they are often engaged in discussions that might be outside of their comfort zones. Participants are encouraged to think about and chew on all that is discussed. They are given a safe place to meet others, whether that person is of a different faith, political party, culture, or lifestyle. As participants become partners in faith formation, they are then able to go into their own faith communities as ambassadors for God, equipped with new tools, new information, and safe relationships of encouragement and hope.

Central United Methodist Church, Monroe, North Carolina:

A United Methodist congregation in Monroe, North Carolina, has adopted a program called “Lifetree Cafe” from Group Publishing.<sup>10</sup> While this is a packaged program, it has allowed this church to step outside of their comfort zone into the community in a practical, and yet spiritual way. Facilitators are trained, licensed, provided with the tools they will need, and then sent into the community to host an hour-long, interactive experience held in a coffee-house setting. The hour features regular people’s stories on film, guided conversations, biblical insights, and relationship building with facilitators and participants. The facilitators have even gone a step further by encouraging attendees to be involved in helping people within their communities. Participants have collected eyeglasses for the Lion’s Club, money for mosquito netting to help eliminate malaria in Africa, and “gear” for the homeless among them in the

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<sup>10</sup> Information about this program can be found at [group.com/lifetree-café](http://group.com/lifetree-café).

community. One facilitator commented, “For me, as someone who grew up in the church, this program has caused me to be more open to engaging and accepting others even when their beliefs differ from mine. It also helps me bring my Christian spiritual life into my secular world every day. I am becoming more comfortable in sharing my faith in a natural way.” While there has not been an increase in the number of people attending the church, lives of both facilitators and participants are being transformed as they engage in conversation about the practical aspects of life and grow spiritually. They all have covenanted to practice their motto, “Doing Life. Doing Good.” as they learn more about themselves and God, growing in faith of heart and life.

As the Church, the body of Christ, begins to explore ways to incorporate both heart and life into its presence and existence in communities all over the U.S., people will begin to be shaped in spirit and faith as they fully grasp that heart and life cannot be separated. In order to find balance in life, to grow to the utmost of our potential as Christ followers, holiness of heart cannot be separated from holiness of life. The symbiotic relationship that exists between heart and life is one that has propelled believers forward into the world for centuries. It is truly impossible to grow in one without growing in the other as fruits of that growth spill out affecting lives and hearts of those around us. Not only is growth evidenced in the visible realm (life, i.e., outward actions; drawing closer to others), but in the spiritual realm (heart, i.e., inward disciplines; drawing closer to God), providing believers with the gift of balance. This balance comes to us when we begin to take responsibility for our part in knowing and serving God and others. Our hearts and lives are joined together as we dance with God and with others. Here are a few examples for people searching for this balance in their lives as they dance toward holiness:

- Become intimate with scripture by reading it, discussing it, and living its precepts. Start with the Gospels to discover the character and mission of Jesus Christ.
- “Act your way into a new way of thinking.”<sup>11</sup> If your behavior changes, so will your way of thinking.
- Pray. This can and does include being still with God, contemplation, confession, and meditation. This includes both personal and corporate prayer as well. Do not be afraid of listening and speaking honestly with God.
- Commit to participating in ministry with a body of believers. Worship together, join together in the Lord’s Supper, celebrate together, learn together, and generously serve others together.
- Take personal responsibility for the way you use your money, the resources that are available to you, and your time.
- Be devoted to your community. Love your zip code and commit to serving the needs of that community, as well as building them up in love. Do not only identify with the people, become one of them.
- Gather with others frequently in some sort of meaningful connection. Use to time to get to know one another deeply, to share concerns and praises, to support and encourage one another, and to discuss life. Become involved with people who are not in the religious community and begin to bring meaning and spiritual reflection into their lives. Make relationship building a priority and allow for time and space to do so.
- Begin to see that everyday life, its experiences and its pleasures, are gifts from God. Embrace this as a way of holy living that mirrors how Jesus lived among and with others. Others will then be able to see Jesus in your actions.
- Practice radical hospitality. Share meals with others as you welcome, celebrate, and nourish one another. Share your table with the poor as often as possible.
- Engage in a radical “party” life that helps people feel they belong and are safe to engage at deeper levels. Enjoy having fun while living like Jesus!
- Experiment with worship rituals and symbols, with style and music, and with mission opportunities. Dream of what things might look like and do not be afraid to change or try new ideas. Celebrate the unique gifts that God gives everyone. Reflect regularly on the overall ministry direction and effectiveness.
- Keep the message simple, yet profound—“Jesus is Lord,” or “God loves you.” Offer hope. Listen to others. Present them with grace.
- Engage in mission *with* (instead of only *to*) others. Care for the environment together. Volunteer your time at a local non-profit. Pursue justice issues with others in the community.
- Take risks, experiment, and be adventurous in life as you embody the life that proclaims Jesus as Lord.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Hirsch and Artclass, 66.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 70-183.

The Wesleyan model of holiness of heart and life provides an important tradition steeped in healthy, balanced spirituality that is essential for believers in the world today. Perhaps we can stop focusing on the physical growth of numbers in the church and begin to focus on the spiritual growth of the people that will produce the kind of healthy, vital churches we are so desperate for. Perhaps, in order to be healthy, we need to lose some weight, bring our numbers down, stop serving so much sugar, or contributing to the fat of the hierarchy. A healthy body does not always need to “grow,” but a healthy body is always going through changes, seeking balance and harmony within the systems of the body. To be healthy takes work, takes responsibility, takes discipline. To have a healthy Christian life, we must continue to be shaped and formed, allowing our hearts and lives to so intertwine that God’s love is visible throughout every system of our bodies and lives. The Church, especially the United Methodist denomination, has the model and knows the importance of a lifetime of spiritual formation, yet for so many years has engaged itself in less urgent matters.

Now is the time. Now is the time to not only show others the dance of holiness, but, to hand out the invitations and encourage their R.S.V.P. The Dancer has invited all and wants to share the moves of grace and love with us so that we can share them with others. Now is the time for, “telling the holy, telling the sacred, telling the holiness,”<sup>13</sup> as Leonard Sweet writes, so that believers will want to spend their lives seeking perfect love with God and neighbor, living fully as heart and life are always related, and drawing closer daily as they grow in God’s grace through the love of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> Leonard Sweet. *11 Genetic Gateways to Spiritual Awakening* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 142.

## **Reflect and Respond**

1. How have you experienced grace in your life?
2. Read Genesis 1:27. What does it mean to be “created in God’s image?”
3. What does it mean to “live into relationships with God and with others?” What kinds of dance do you think of?
4. Describe the difficulties you have with finding the balance between the spirituality of heart and of life.
5. What does this mean to you personally: “telling the holy, telling the sacred, telling the holiness.”
6. In John 15, Jesus talks about being the vine and implies that we are the branches. He says, “No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.” (John 15: 4b, NIV) What does this mean in terms of dancing with God for your life?
7. 1 John 2:4-6: “The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.” (NIV) How do you understand the word ‘obey’ in this context? In striving to live holiness of heart and life?
8. What dance is God calling you to join next?

## **Be Transformed**

1. Find a song (or songs) that helps you to remember or feel like you are dancing with God. Play the song often, especially when you might be trying to dance alone.
2. Resolve to make one routine in your life an intentional part of God’s dance – for example, meditate on dancing with God while unloading the dishwasher. How can you incorporate the mundane events of life into joyful dancing with the Creator?
3. Plan to practice at least one of the spiritual disciplines (perhaps one that is uncomfortable for you) each day this week. Discuss your experience with others.

## Postscript

*“God must do something **in** us before God can do something mighty through us.*  
—Leonard Sweet<sup>1</sup>

I realize that as I come to the completion of this work that I have not addressed a couple of key points that need further research and discussion. I’d like to begin discussion now in the hopes that someone will continue the research in these areas. First, how can we reclaim a “movement” mindset when the Church is so deeply entrenched in being an institution? Second, if the world is moving toward a plummeting religious affiliation, how can we who care deeply about “spreading holiness across the land,” be the body of Christ in the world, as traditional forms of faith and practice continue to be replaced by those with no religious foundation?

The first question causes me to pause deeply. As a lifelong United Methodist, my heart yearns for an overhauled church. What I mean by this is that I’d like to see the teachings of John Wesley and the traditions of the past re-formed for the 21st century, with a promise to make re-formation and modifications an ongoing process. I am currently a part of a Congregational Leadership Development group this is engaged in trying new ways of spurring on renewal in my local church. One thing I have learned is that Methodists like to plan things. Committees are assigned and the plan is developed until it is ready to be attempted. Often, after the event or program is introduced to the world, many churches are then done—no reflection or assessment of the event or program to see if it met expectations or aided others in faith development. I wonder if this

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<sup>1</sup> Sweet, *11 Genetic Gateways*, 113.

is because we have become so wary of hurting someone's feelings? You know what I mean—Mrs. White spent so much time and energy planning the bazaar that no one would dare point out the things that could be improved upon. Let me ask then, “When did anything we do in loving service to God and others become about us?” The answer here is, “It isn't about us; it is all about God.” Therefore, we should be able to lovingly assess with each other the effectiveness of what has been done. Once the assessment occurs, we should be able to adapt, improve, or even do away with the event or program (or whatever) as we determine if what was done is grounded in the mission of the church. The planning, attempting, assessing, and adapting are circular in nature and enable us to continue to grow together as we discover new ideas and encourage creativity in fulfilling the mission of the church. While each church has a different mission statement, the overall mission for all of us is to glorify God and advance the good news of Jesus Christ in the world. Believers should be working to transform religion into a relationship with Jesus Christ—one person at a time. I recently asked friends of mine to send me the mission statement of their church. Here are some responses:

- To be the family of God, following the way of Jesus, living simply and sacrificially serving our neighborhood.
- Worshipping God, Loving and Serving Others, Sharing the Good News.
- Reaching out to all people with the love of Jesus Christ through our worship, prayer, and action.
- To know Christ and to make him known.
- To be a family of Christians embracing God's love and grace by reaching out to share our faith with all people.
- Transforming religion into a relationship with Jesus Christ one person at a time.
- Sharing the Love of Jesus so All Become His Followers.

All of these seem to be variations of the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with



you always, even to the end of the age”<sup>2</sup> and the Great Commandment: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”<sup>3</sup> Is everything we do in the name of the church focused on these missions? Are we assessing, adapting, then improving so that hungry souls are being fed spiritually?

For whatever reasons, the Church appears stuck—a slave to committees, afraid to make changes, and mired in “the way it’s always been done” mud of selfishness and short sightedness. This is not only affecting the local churches within cities, towns, and communities across the U.S., but it is affecting the institutional being that we call “The Church” as well. It seems as if we have lost our sense of what it means to “practice” faith. While committees aren’t bad in and of themselves, everyone in the church needs to fully understand the mission of the church so that all are going in the same direction. It is then, when we dance together, connected to God, with God, and because of God’s grace in our lives, that we move in God’s direction. We are no longer alone on the dance floor but truly the body of Christ in the arms of a loving and gracious God, leading us and guiding us through the Spirit as we become Jesus incarnate in the world.

As I have studied Wesley’s vision and teachings intently over the past three years, I have come to understand him as a man who was not only good at planning and doing, but also proficient at assessing and adapting. Early in Wesley’s life and faith journey, his attention to keeping order and following the established rules prevailed. As he allowed

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:19-20, Common English Bible.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 22:35-41, Common English Bible.

God's grace to transform both heart and life, as he truly began to dance with the Master in the lead, he became motivated to put souls above the ecclesial rules. When he understood that there were people not welcomed in the church, he went to them. Because preachers were scarce, he trained lay people who propelled the movement and worked to "spread holiness throughout the land." After the settling of America had begun, he ordained anyone who would go (a practice not endorsed by his beloved Anglican Church). When there were no men available for ministry, he assigned laywomen the work that needed to be done. When one small group was ready to move into a deeper discovery of the Triune God, he developed classes where they could be nurtured and allowed to practice their faith. Wesley seemed to always be planning, doing, assessing, and then adapting his "methods" of "offering Christ" to every community. How have we gotten so far from these practices? Why are we so afraid of change when change happens every day in every aspect of life? How can we reclaim Wesley's vision and propensity for holy living as we discover more about the Triune God who fills us with grace and love, transforming both our hearts and our lives? I believe the answer lies in allowing God to lead the dance, and our willingness to take responsibility to practice the dance steps with God and with one another.

I also wonder if the world is moving toward plummeting religious affiliations, can we, who care deeply about "spreading holiness across the land," be the body of Christ in the world as traditional forms of faith and practice are replaced by those without a religious foundation? Butler Bass suggests that believers should *prepare* themselves by learning the script of God's story; *practice* rehearsing faith intentionally in ways that include compassion and justice; *play* (yes, play and have fun) with others as the delight

and wonder of God's story are experienced; and fully *participate* in making the changes you want to see, alternating roles and responsibilities with others and joining together in the unfolding of God's story in the world.<sup>4</sup> Leonard Sweet reminds us that, as Methodists, we encourage one another to practice faith, to practice growing closer to God, and to practice a deepening of our identity in Christ, as we become Jesus in the world empowered and animated by the Holy Spirit imaginatively guiding and directing us.<sup>5</sup> Please understand that practice won't be easy. It will require "discipline in our discipleship," "a hope grounded in the promises of God" no matter the condition of the world, and a resolve to "live a dynamic faith with intensity and passion."<sup>6</sup> Yes, living a life that is grounded in the Trinity, visible and productive in the world, and enthusiastic about sharing and being a part of God's narrative, is counter-cultural. Just remember that light bulbs were once criticized too. Now, we find it difficult to live without them lighting up the dark places. When we become Jesus' hands and feet in the world, when we are a living vessel for the power of the Spirit, and when God is our victory in all things, others will hopefully find it difficult to live without the light that illuminates all the dark places in the soul.

We cannot ever go back to the way things used to be. I, for one, am glad. I like my computer and my microwave. As we practice our faith in a world where faith in God appears to be on the decline and viewed as ignorant, where institutions focus on rules and not on showing people "the way of salvation," it will be important to understand that as

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<sup>4</sup> Butler Bass, 260-261.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Sweet. *The Greatest Story Never Told: Revive Us Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 114-115.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-109.

long as there are followers of Jesus willing to be transformed and then willing to be a part of the transforming of God's world in love, the dance of heart and life will continue. That is our hope. That is our longing.

## Appendix A

### SURVEY

#### **Demographics/data**

1. Average attendance in worship:
2. Number of small groups held weekly, their title, and their focus:
3. Number of small groups held less than weekly, their title, and focus:
4. Average attendance in each small group:
5. Number of ordained or licensed clergy leading small groups:
6. Number of laity leading small groups:
7. Approximate percentage of church growth or decline over the past 5 years (please specify):

#### **Discipleship and Evangelism**

##### Means of Grace are:

**Works of Piety**, such as: individual prayer, fasting, searching scriptures, healthy living, public worship, as well as communal practices of Holy Communion, baptism, and Christian community (conferencing/fellowship)

**Works of Mercy**, such as: any service focused toward individual needs - doing good (Good works); visiting the sick; visiting the imprisoned; feeding & clothing those in need; as well as service focused toward communal/societal needs--such as: the seeking of justice.

1. Describe the “means of grace” that you regularly participate in.
2. Describe the “means of grace” that you believe the majority of your active congregation regularly participates in.

3. State your understanding of “evangelical” -
4. Wesley once said, “If your heart is as my heart, give me your hand.” What does this mean to you?
5. John Wesley was always reminding people about the importance of both “the form and the power of holiness.” What does this mean to you?
6. Please list ways that your church “offers Christ” to the community and world:
7. Define “Incarnational Ministry:”

Rate the following statements:

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = no opinion 4= agree 5 = strongly agree

- Human nature is perfectible by God’s grace.
- Learning comes by doing the will of God.
- Mankind’s nature is perfected by participation in groups, not by acting as isolated individuals.
- The spirit and practice of primitive Christianity can and must be recaptured.
- Human progress will occur if people will participate in “the means of grace.”
- The gospel must be presented to the poor.
- The primary function of spiritual/education leadership is to equip others to lead and minister, not to perform the ministry personally.
- Every United Methodist member should be under someone’s direct and immediate supervision in regards to their spiritual health and growth.
- Those who teach Sunday school or other small groups should have regular training.
- It is important for spiritual growth that people confess their faults to one another as they meet in small groups and then together pray for healing.

- Within small groups, biblical principles should be discussed but participants must be urged toward practical performance.
- I consider my church a missional church.
- My church cares for the poor on a regular basis.
- I believe the United Methodist Church is evangelical in nature.
- If your faith as a Christian is genuine, then others will be able to see it lived out in loving ways.

## SURVEY RESULTS

The average size of worship attendance was 105, with 81% of the churches reporting an attendance of 150 or less. The average number of small groups meeting weekly was four.

The types and focus of these small groups varied, however the following list are the 10 primary types of these small groups::

Sunday School Classes (33%), Bible/Book/Topical Study (28%), Children/Middle school/Youth programs not Sunday school (9%), Accountability Groups (9%), Choirs all types/ages (6%), Women's Groups (5%), Prayer Groups/Prayer Shawl/Prayer Knitting ministry (4%), Mid week service/dinner/event (3%), Men's Groups (2%), and Confirmation Classes (1%).

Four churches out of the 72 who reported, indicated no small groups that met weekly.

Small groups that met less than weekly:

Women's Groups (20%), Bible Studies/Seasonal Studies/Specific Studies (16%), Children/Middle school/Youth (7%), Home Groups (7%), Men's Groups (6%), Mission Focused Groups (4%), Committees (3%).

The average attendance in all small groups combined was 11 people. The number of ordained and/or licensed clergy leading small groups averaged one (1). The number of lay people leading small groups was six. As respondents described the focus or intention of the groups that met in with churches, most included words like study, instruction, or

meeting in their descriptions. Groups that were reported to be focused on interactive discipleship and spiritual formation were in the minority (6-9%).

Of the churches responding to the survey, 67% reported either no growth or a decline in church membership during the past year; the remaining 33%, reported a 15% growth within the past year. Several reported discrepancies between membership growth (number on the rolls) versus growth in attendance (those who attend services and events regularly). Some reported that the membership was in decline but attendance had increased and others reported the opposite. Two respondents commented that growth should not always be measured by numbers. They stated that the growth of their attendees in spiritual understanding and faith was increased but that this was often difficult to measure.

The second section of the survey dealt with the respondents understanding of discipleship, faith formation, and evangelism. When asked about their practices in observing the means of grace, the responses by clergy, in order of those most chosen are:

Prayer, searching the scriptures, public worship, communal practice of Holy Communion, visiting the sick, healthy living, being involved in Christian community through conferencing and fellowship, participating in regular meetings/covenant with other clergy, feeding and clothing those in need, participating in baptism, activism in community committees outside of the church, participating in mission opportunities, fasting, tithing and additional giving outside the church, counseling others, visiting the imprisoned and working for social justice issues, journaling, reading, good works, seeking spiritual direction, participating in funerals and weddings.

They believe that their parishioners regularly participate in: (again in the order of most chosen)

Prayer, public worship, searching the scriptures, communal practice of Holy Communion, feeding and clothing those in need, visiting the sick, being involved in Christian community through conferencing and fellowship, participating in mission opportunities, activism in community committees outside of the church,



participating in baptism, good works, healthy living, additional giving outside the church, counseling others, visiting the imprisoned, fasting, working for social justice, participating in weddings, and being involved in at least a weekly covenant group.

The minister and the congregants appear to participate in the means of grace in similar ways with all participating regularly in public worship, prayer, searching the scriptures, and Holy Communion. While the clergy mentioned participating in regular meetings/covenant with other clergy, they did not believe that their congregants took part in these types of covenantal activities with other Christians (chosen the least among respondents). Tithing and additional giving outside of the church was important to clergy however, none believed that their congregants tithed.

In stating their understanding of the term “evangelical,” 91% of respondents said that evangelical meant: sharing the love of God and the message of salvation to others; living and practicing Jesus’ command to love; enjoying and sharing the good news of Jesus the Christ; sharing our experience of God with those around us; reaching out to all people with the love of Jesus Christ; sharing the gospel message and introducing people to Christ; sharing the good news of God’s love embodied for humanity in Jesus Christ. The remaining 9% were seemingly disgruntled with the word itself and some even refused to define it. One said, “I do not use the term. I describe myself as Wesleyan rather than evangelical.”

Respondents were asked a couple of questions specific to John Wesley. First they were asked to explain, “Wesley once said, ‘If your heart is as my heart, give me your hand.’” This quote is from a Wesley sermon entitled “Catholic Spirit.” In it, John Wesley exhorted believers to love all of mankind, even enemies, as well as enemies of God, as a

brother or sister in Christ. Ninety-five percent of those who responded appeared to understand this statement. The second statement was concerning “the form and the power of holiness,” something John Wesley often remarked to others of its importance. He said, “I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.”<sup>7</sup> This meant that it was not enough to know God with the mind. One must know God with the heart through Jesus Christ, God’s Son, and one must continue to grow in doctrine and spirit as they participate in the disciplines (means of grace) throughout their Christian journey. Sixty percent of all of the respondents gave answers reflective of this understanding.

When asked to list ways that their churches “offer Christ” to the community and the world, 100% mentioned being active in community mission and outreach. The predominant way to “offer Christ” centered on taking care of those less fortunate or those with physical needs. Holding worship services and other events, such as Bible study, Vacation Bible school, or a prayer ministry within the church building were other ways respondents answered this question. Monetary donations to both local and global missions were also important, as well as welcoming all that entered the church. There were wonderful stories of so much great mission work that all cannot be listed here. Yet, there was no mention of intentional practices of discipleship or spiritual formation offered outside of the church community.

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<sup>7</sup> Davies, 527.

The final definition was an understanding of “incarnational ministry.” Although the wording varied, the gist of the majority of responses defined the term as: living as Jesus in the world; ministry that brings the living Christ to others; ministry empowered and driven by the Holy Spirit; seeing Jesus in others and living Jesus within ourselves; living Jesus ‘out loud’ and acting as his hands and heart on earth; and ministry infused with the love and power of Jesus Christ living in us as we serve. Four out of 72 stated they had no idea what this term meant.

The survey was completed as respondents rated a statement using a 5 point rating scale, 5 = strongly agree and 1 = strongly disagree. Only three answers received ratings of strongly agree: The gospel must be presented to the poor (57.1%); the primary function of spiritual/education leadership is to equip others to lead and minister, not to perform the ministry personally (41.4%); and if your faith as a Christian is genuine, then others will be able to see it lived out in loving ways (67.1%). While most respondents agreed with the statement “It is important for spiritual growth that people confess their faults to one another as they meet in small groups” (51.4%), over 20% had no opinion about this statement, which was a key practice in the early Methodist movement. And while 51.4% agreed that the United Methodist church was evangelical in nature, over 15% had no opinion. It was unsettling to see over 25% of respondents have no opinion or disagree/strongly disagree when answering “I consider my church a missional church.” Twenty percent of respondents answered “disagree” when answering “Every United Methodist should be under someone’s direct and immediate supervision in regards to their spiritual health and growth,” another practice in the early Methodist movement.

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## Appendix B

### Survey and Results

#### **SURVEY**

##### **1. Demographics/data**

1. Average attendance in worship:
2. Number of small groups held weekly, their title, and their focus:
3. Number of small groups held less than weekly, their title, and focus:
4. Average attendance in each small group:
5. Number of ordained or licensed clergy leading small groups:
6. Number of laity leading small groups:
7. Approximate percentage of church growth or decline over the past 5 years (please specify):

##### **2. Discipleship and Evangelism**

###### Means of Grace are:

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1. Describe the “means of grace” that you regularly participate in.
2. Describe the “means of grace” that you believe the majority of your active congregation regularly participates in.
3. State your understanding of “evangelical.”

4. Wesley once said, “If your heart is as my heart, give me your hand.” What does this mean to you?
5. John Wesley was always reminding people about the importance of both “the form and the power of holiness.” What does this mean to you?
6. Please list ways that your church “offers Christ” to the community and world:
7. Define “Incarnational Ministry:”

Rate the following statements:

**1= Strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = no opinion 4= agree 5 = strongly agree**

1. Human nature is perfectible by God’s grace.
2. Learning comes by doing the will of God.
3. Mankind’s nature is perfected by participation in groups, not by acting as isolated individuals.
4. The spirit and practice of primitive Christianity can and must be recaptured.
5. Human progress will occur if people will participate in “the means of grace.”
6. The gospel must be presented to the poor.
7. The primary function of spiritual/education leadership is to equip others to lead and minister, not to perform the ministry personally.
8. Every United Methodist member should be under someone’s direct and immediate supervision in regards to their spiritual health and growth.
9. Those who teach Sunday school or other small groups should have regular training.
10. It is important for spiritual growth that people confess their faults to one another as they meet in small groups and then together pray for healing.
11. Within small groups, biblical principles should be discussed but participants must be urged toward practical performance.

12. I consider my church a missional church.
13. My church cares for the poor on a regular basis.
14. I believe the United Methodist Church is evangelical in nature.
15. If your faith as a Christian is genuine, then others will be able to see it lived out in loving ways.

### **SURVEY RESULTS**

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Prayer, public worship, searching the scriptures, communal practice of Holy Communion, feeding and clothing those in need, visiting the sick, being involved in Christian community through conferencing and fellowship, participating in mission opportunities, activism in community committees outside of the church, participating in baptism, good works, healthy living, additional giving outside the church, counseling others, visiting the imprisoned, fasting, working for social justice, participating in weddings, and being involved in at least a weekly covenant group.

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<sup>1</sup> Davies, 527.

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Twenty percent of respondents answered, “disagree” when answering, “Every United Methodist should be under someone’s direct and immediate supervision in regards to their spiritual health and growth,” another practice in the early Methodist movement.

## Appendix C

### Reforming Wesley's Groups for the 21st Century

**Early Practice:** Societies

**Re-Visioned Practice:** “Family” Gatherings that call together all people intent on growing in the grace and will of God. These gatherings would involve shared leadership planning and execution, both contemporary and traditional practices of worship, discussion and spontaneity, story-telling and images, reflection and meditation, and so on. These meetings would constitute a small cell of people that are “free to worship in [their] own way while integrated into the larger church.”<sup>1</sup>

**Early Practice:** Class Meetings

**Re-Visioned Practice:** Small groups meeting together for spiritual accountability in love; required participation for each attendee in the church for adults over age 18; organized by gender into groups of 3-5 people. (A similar model could be incorporated for children and youth from age 12 but would require adult training and participation.) A place for loving concern and respect, relationship building, study and prayer, spiritual discipleship and faith formation. They would meet regularly, where and when they wanted to, and structure the groups as they wanted with the emphasis on aiding in their own and other's faith formation in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> Sweet, *Post Modern Pilgrims*, 121.

**Early Practice:** The Bands

**Re-Visioned Practice:** A voluntary group, for both men and women, who desired a deeper walk with Christ. This group would have a regular mission/outreach focus as well, that would allow them to BE their faith in tangible ways as they engage “with” the community. They would acknowledge that they are the “sent” realizing that the church does not have a mission but that the mission has a church. This group would also be expected to be in leadership within the family meetings, as they mentored new attendees and helped to lead worship. Group size would not exceed 12.

**Early Practice:** Sunday School

**Re-Visioned Practice:** The traditional way of Sunday school appears to be no longer working in many churches. A new approach would be to do away with age-level classes; replace with intergenerational interactions and learning opportunities, perhaps in stations, or a rotating model of instruction. While being informative, they should also be engaging and interactive for all participants as well as connect them in meaningful ways to one another. It would be important as well to provide interesting and interactive resources for parents and children to do together at times away from the church, including crafts, DVD’s, journaling, stories from scripture, games, etc., and to design ways for all participants to pledge to learn more about God. These efforts would be celebrated regularly rather than being met with judgment or punishment for not meeting design requirements.

**Early Practice:** Breaking of Bread

**Re-Visioned Practice:** Early Christians and Methodists were always sharing a meal together. In this culture of fast food and little time for much life at home, eating

together is now considered a luxury. A new way would be to challenge your congregation to have meals with others at least 2 times a week—one with someone in the faith community, and one with someone outside of the community of faith. This would be a simple meal and a time for sharing, fellowship, trust building, and radical hospitality. When this is incorporated into the body of believers, it is predicted that a certain rhythm will begin to come through, as well as an increased understanding and practice of intentional community.



