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Means of Grace as Formative Holiness: The Role and Significance of John Wesley's Spiritual Formation Practices in The Pursuit of Christian Holiness for The Church of The Nazarene

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GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

MEANS OF GRACE AS FORMATIVE HOLINESS: THE ROLE AND
SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN WESLEY'S SPIRITUAL FORMATION PRACTICES IN
THE PURSUIT OF CHRISTIAN HOLINESS FOR
THE CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

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AIMEE STONE COOPER

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Aimee Stone Cooper

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 10, 2016
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

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ABSTRACT

Within the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition broadly, and the Church of the Nazarene specifically, occasional confusion, distrust and skepticism has arisen concerning “spiritual formation.” Some of the underlying issues may reflect a lack of understanding regarding what Christian spiritual formation is and is not, where the language comes from, what is meant by traditional Christian disciplines of formation, and how those practices relate to holiness theology and sanctification.

The purpose of this dissertation is to thoughtfully and practically engage this subject through the lens of John Wesley, for whom the means of grace are a practical marriage of God’s work and our participation, and are centered directly in the stream of orthodox Christianity. These practices are an invitation for all Christians, but especially for those who value holiness of heart and life. The aimed-for outcome is that Nazarenes will re-discover Wesley’s means of grace practices and wholeheartedly embrace them with the purpose of pursuing growth in grace toward holiness of heart and life.

Section 1 presents a storied representation of the problem, provides an overview of spiritual formation within the Church of the Nazarene, and flushes out the aforementioned problem. Section 2 engages an overview of solutions for Christian formation from a Wesleyan perspective, and within the Church of the Nazarene specifically. Section 3 outlines an overview of John Wesley’s means of grace and offers an application within the Church of the Nazarene; namely, that Wesley’s means of grace are essential practices for both personal and corporate entities wishing to grow in holiness. Sections 4 and 5 outline the specifics for a Small Groups curriculum engaging Wesley’s means of grace practices for an ongoing spiritual formation / discipleship

experience. Section 6 offers suggestions for further research, additional reading, and the limits of this project. The Artifact is the abovementioned curriculum.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The Church of the Nazarene unapologetically identifies itself as a Christian denomination in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition; one that has, from its conception, derived much of its spiritual vision “from the doctrinal core of John Wesley’s preaching.”¹ This project seeks to offer an accessible model for discipleship within the Church of the Nazarene that is rooted in the practical theology of John Wesley. The paper synthesizes an honest reflection of the Nazarene Church and its place in the stream of Wesleyan theology, while it introduces Wesley’s means of grace practices as being definitively formative for individuals and groups of believers pursuing holiness of heart and life.

Formation into the likeness of Christ was critical to Wesley. And, Christian spiritual formation was of particular interest to Wesley; it was a topic he wrote extensively about. He phrased much of his ideology around the concept of the means of

¹ See the official website of the denomination: <http://www.nazarene.org>. In multiple places, the Church readily identifies herself as being a part of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. The word “Wesleyan” in this sense identifies the Church of the Nazarene as a theological heir of John Wesley and his ideology. The first established Christian denomination birthed from Wesley’s teachings was the Methodist denomination which can trace its history directly to the person of John Wesley and his ordaining and sending of missionaries to the “New World” in the Americas in 1784. The Church of the Nazarene was established over a century later, though it self-identifies as theologically in line with the teachings of John Wesley and his brother Charles. The word “holiness” in this sense refers to the movement of many churches and Christians toward the end of the 19th century, primarily in North America, whereby “holiness of heart and life” and “an experience of a second work of grace was earnestly sought.” See Stan Ingersol, *Roots: Pastors, Prophets, Revivalists, Reformers* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2009), 56. Sometimes known as the “American-Holiness movement,” it is often connected with the theological teaching of “Wesleyans.” However, it was actually a distinct movement in the early 20th century with a broader audience; it included participants from a wide source of church denominations. Those who consider themselves “Wesleyan-Holiness” today have inherited a synthetic blend of the theology of the Wesley brothers, and the American Holiness Movement. For more information, see especially: <http://www.nazarene.org/files/docs/wesleyantradition.pdf>; <http://www.nazarene.org/ministries/administration/visitorcenter/history/display.html>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holiness_movement.

grace. As Randy Maddox points out, “Wesley’s interest in the means of grace spanned his life and pervades his writings.”² It would be difficult to treat Wesley and his writings fairly, and miss the significance Wesley placed on Christians being intentional about their formation in Christ. In fact, Wesley himself claims,

Men are generally lost in the hurry of life, in the business or pleasures of it, and seem to think that their regeneration, their new nature, will spring and grow up within them, with as little care and thought of their own as their bodies were conceived and have attained their full strength and stature; whereas, there is nothing more certain than that the Holy Spirit will not purify our nature, unless we carefully attend to his motions, which are lost upon us while, in the Prophet's language, we “scatter away our time,”—while we squander away our thoughts upon unnecessary things, and leave our spiritual improvement, the one thing needful, quite unthought of and neglected.³

Throughout his writings Wesley calls Christians to prioritize their life in Christ and therefore to purposefully engage the means of grace practices as often as possible. The hope being that Christians would emphatically pursue God’s grace with the intention of a profound heart change, with the result being a more authentic love of God and neighbor as passionately and entirely as possible.

² Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 192. Maddox goes on to include a list (though not exhaustive) of a broad range of Wesley’s means including “such universal Christian practices as fasting, prayer, Eucharist, and devotional readings to more distinctively Methodist practices like class meetings, love feasts, and special rules of holy living.” In Chapter 8, Maddox engages a discourse on the means and on their theological significance, especially noting the particular ways Wesley seems to assume grace is at work.

³ For a wealth of Wesleyan resources, see <http://wesley.nnu.edu>. In addition to many writings of subsequent Wesleyan scholars and theologians, the site hosts an exhaustive collection of John Wesley’s personal writings, including the majority of his sermons available in both alphabetical order as well as per the numbering of the 1872 Thomas Jackson edition. This quote of Wesley is found in his sermon entitled, “On Grieving the Holy Spirit,” written in 1733. A link to this sermon can be found at: <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-138-on-grieving-the-holy-spirit/>. All subsequent references to this sermon will be noted as “Wesley, *On Grieving the Holy Spirit* #138” and then the section number and the paragraph number (when available). All subsequent references to any other sermon will be noted as “Wesley, *title of sermon* # of sermon, and then the section and paragraph number (when available), and a link to the online version.

The underlying question posed in this paper is simple: what role and significance do Wesley's means of grace practices have for the Church of the Nazarene in the 21st century? In other words, if Wesley gifted the Church with the theology that would sculpt Nazarene theology, what practical role (if any) does Wesley have for the Church of the Nazarene today? Gregory Clapper writes, "If our life is not marked by very specific and complex patterns of heart-response to [the Gospel], we have not really heard or understood the good news."⁴ By making this claim, Clapper is suggesting that in order to be faithfully Wesleyan, certain "specific and complex patterns of heart-responses" are imperative.⁵ It is with this assumption in mind that this paper asks one foundational question: what roles do Christian disciplines of formation, or means of grace, have for a person pursuing holiness of heart and life?

Section 1 of this project outlines the perceived problem, offers a narrative story reflective of the stated dilemma, and lays the foundations for the reasoning of this work. Section 2 presents a short list of scholarly voices concerning practical application of Wesley's means of grace broadly, and the Church of the Nazarene specifically. Section 3 offers a brief history of the Church of the Nazarene, outlines an overview of John Wesley's means of grace practices, and offers an application within the Church of the Nazarene; namely, that Wesley's means of grace are essential practices for both personal and corporate entities wishing to grow in holiness. Sections 4 and 5 outline the specifics

⁴ Gregory Clapper, *As If the Heart Mattered: A Wesleyan Spirituality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), Kindle, Loc. 57.

⁵ Ibid. The phrase "Wesleyan" in this context eludes to people for whom the theology of John and Charles Wesley has been formative. The phrase here does not refer exclusively to the specific Wesleyan denomination, though they would certainly be included in the broad group of denominations who consider themselves *Wesleyan*.

for a Small Group curriculum engaging Wesley's means of grace practices. Section 6 offers suggestions for further research, additional reading, and the limits of this project. The Artifact is a book proposal for a small group Bible study curriculum on Wesley's means of grace practices.

Story

James and Francis are a young Nazarene couple who have been married for just over six years. They hope to start their family soon. They are both Christians, raised in the Church of the Nazarene, who are still quite active in their local Nazarene congregation. At a young age James and Francis learned to memorize scripture (through Bible Quizzing), sing songs about God (James has helped lead worship for almost 10 years), and “make good choices” (both were leaders in their youth group). James and Francis both went to Nazarene institutions for their undergraduate education, which is how they met and where they fell in love. The young couple has a strong desire to be “Christian” today—but recently they have begun to wonder what that means, and how to live it out. Faith feels distant from their life. They want to grow deeper in their relationship with Christ. However, Sunday morning worship and various other church activities have all started to feel more like obligations than anything life-giving. Both James and Francis have begun questioning their attendance of church on a weekly basis. They wonder whether going to church is, among other practices, “a must” for someone claiming to be a Christian.

On a deeper level, James and Francis secretly wonder if there is anything more to a sincere faith journey. Both have explored various systems of discipleship (they have been in multiple small groups, and are now leading a Young Adults Sunday School

class). They feel as though they have “heard it all before,” and both are growing restless. Every sermon feels like something they have heard a handful of times before. There is little wonder left in their hearts, and no life in their worship. The more they *do* for the church, the less connected they feel. And, their relationship with Christ (both as individuals, and as a couple) has definitely become something other than what it once was. It now feels like work, and intimacy with Christ in prayer feels like a foreign language. Their Bible sits on their bookshelf gathering dust—“we use our iReaders” they justify—but, if they are honest, they only do so sporadically. Their pocketbook shows that they tithe regularly, but do not live generously apart from any perceived obligations. Hidden in their pantry is a small collection of wine, which they both enjoy but would never confess to having, since church leadership (officially) prohibits the consumption of alcohol. There is no place in their lives for honest, true friendships, and it feels as though there is no safe place to ask the questions burning in their hearts. With their heads they understand the call for all Christians to “be holy,” but they don’t understand what that looks like in their everyday lives. Though the Church’s theology of holiness is something that resonates with their hearts, they admit it is only to a certain extent. They have questions about holiness for which they have not found practical answers. James and Francis are at a crossroads. Will they continue on the path that has brought them this far, or will they choose another way?

Problem

The Church of the Nazarene, while being theologically linked with John Wesley, has underestimated Wesley’s means of grace practices as a positive tool for holiness formation/Christian discipleship. Theologically, Wesley absolutely understood holiness

and sanctification to be a result of God's work of grace—not at all as something to be earned; and yet he simultaneously placed a significantly high value on the participation of God's people with God's work, resulting in holiness of heart and life.⁶ In fact, for Wesley, the believers' intentional engagement with those means of grace practices is so homogeneous to that person's pursuit of holiness, it is inextricable from any theology of grace, sanctification, and/or holiness of heart and life.

Therefore, the means of grace practices are significant invitations for Christians, both personally and corporately, to recognize, allow, and celebrate God's presence and work in and through their lives. They are *historical*, in that they have been a part of the nature of God's people since the beginning. They are *relevant* in that they are applicable, accessible, and advantageous for us today. And, they are *significant* in that they are valuable practices which allow God's people to be shaped by grace, in grace, and through grace, for God's glory alone.

While the Nazarene denomination has traditionally placed a high priority on personal and corporate discipleship, it has overlooked the significance of Wesley's means of grace practices as an approachable model of formation for its people. Some within the Nazarene denomination have prioritized Wesley's theology, ignoring the practical patterns of engagement needed to pursue authentic holiness of heart and life. This has led to a skepticism regarding spiritual formation practices in certain subgroups within the

⁶ The early Church of the Nazarene embraced this dichotomy. An official statement from the *Manual, 1915* notes: "There is a marked distinction between a perfect heart and a perfect character. The former is obtained in an instant, but the latter is the result of growth in grace. It is one thing to have the heart all yielded to God and occupied by Him; it is quite another thing to have the entire character, in every detail, harmonize with His Spirit, and the life become conformable to His image." *Nazarene Manual: 1915*, 20.

Nazarene denomination.⁷ This indifference might stem from the fact that in their theological perspective some Nazarenes are more Wesleyan and others are more American-Holiness.⁸ It can also be argued that some Nazarenes disregard certain spiritual formation practices because they are skeptical of contemporary spiritual formation language.⁹ Others may disregard spiritual formation practices simply from a lack of

⁷ For some, it should be noted, the means of grace practices are closely related to our contemporary understanding of spiritual formation practices. Wesley certainly never used our current “spiritual formation” language, but many have argued that the sentiment of spiritual formation can be seen throughout Wesley, in particular with regard to his perspective on the means of grace. In addition to Leclerc, consider Oden, *John Wesley’s Teachings Volumes 1 & 2*; and Clapper, *As If the Heart Mattered*. Also, Knight writes, “Relationships of love with God and our neighbor depend on our experience of God’s presence, our living and walking in eternity. If the means of grace are used without that sense they are dead formality, for they are not the means through which we have a living relationship with God” (*The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, Kindle Loc. 683). That perspective aligns closely with many current working definitions of spiritual formation. Consider the definition of Robert Mulholland, *Invitation To A Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 25, “Spiritual formation is a process of *being conformed* to the image of Christ, a journey into becoming persons of compassion, persons who forgive, persons who care deeply for others and the world, persons who offer themselves to God to become agents of divine grace in the lives of others and their world—in brief, persons who love and serve as Jesus did.” Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart, Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 22, writes, “Christian spiritual formation is focused entirely on Jesus. Its goal is an obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ.” And later, in *The Great Omission: Rediscovering Jesus’ Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 53, Willard defined spiritual formation as “the process whereby the inmost being of the individual (the heart, will, or spirit) take on the quality or character of Jesus Himself.” Christian spiritual formation, then, is the process of being formed into the character and life of Christ for the sake of others. And, if that is true, it is easy to see that perspective strongly represented throughout Wesley, though he lived in a time with different language and perspective. His means of grace practices are not exactly synonymous with “Christian formation,” though neither are they antithetical to the conversation either. It is fair to treat Wesley’s means of grace as a legitimate option for those seeking traditional, historical, Christian spiritual formation practices, though that language is never explicit in Wesley.

⁸ In this case, those who would be more “Wesleyan” could be considered people who value the process of holiness—much like John and Charles Wesley did. It has been argued that the Methodists were initially sent to the Americas by the Wesley’s specifically because the Wesley’s highly valued the method of pursuing holiness; much of what we might consider significant practices of the means of grace would have been highly esteemed. It is the understanding of this author, that the American-Holiness movement was more of an experiential pursuit of a second work of grace, known as sanctification, whereby they were convinced they became wholly God’s. Those who place a higher value on a “crisis experience” may have been more formed by American-holiness theology.

⁹ If one does not have a balanced understanding of traditional, historical, Christian formation practices and their partnership with personal and corporate holiness formation, it is possible they might perceive spiritual formation as merely a “new” way to approach spirituality. For those, it would logically

understanding the significance of the practices themselves (i.e. their history and particular invitation for growth). And, there may be those whose theological view of sanctification does not allow for development of personal spiritual growth. For instance, if one views sanctification as a crisis experience, resulting in a state of completeness, a natural disregard for *journey* or *process* or *growth* would logically follow; if one particular moment makes one perfect, it would be easy and even reasonable to discount any progression of formation, once perfect sanctification has been achieved or experienced.¹⁰

There is, of course, a plethora of reasons that some Nazarenes might neglect spiritual formation practices in their personal faith-journey. Enter Wesley, who gifted the church with an accessible model of spiritual formation, or discipleship: traditional means of grace practices.

follow they might hold a skepticism of that language and perspective. Consider the ideology of the Concerned Nazarene Movement, who have been vocal against most things related to “spiritual formation.” A brief survey of their written statements online would indicate they lump spiritual formation practices with other damaging non-biblical practices, even going so far as to equate some traditional Christian formation practices as being “of the occult” and the Roman Catholic Church as being a “false religion.” Specifically problematic for this group appears to be practices of contemplative prayer, prayer labyrinths, and anything eluding to a spirituality of mysticism. See: <https://reformednazarene.wordpress.com/category/contemplative-spiritualmysticismnew-age/>. There also appears to be a strong bias in their writing that anything “Catholic” is not necessarily “Christian.” See: <https://reformednazarene.wordpress.com/nazarene-denomination-losing-its-way/about/why-are-we-concerned/>. This perspective is assuredly not held as a majority opinion within the Church of the Nazarene; yet the Concerned Nazarene’s commitment to exposing what they called “the ‘new’ spirituality that is infiltrating the [Nazarene] denomination” gained some traction toward the beginning of this century. See: www.concernednazarenes.org. Though the Concerned Nazarenes did not gain official leadership in the church, there was a distinct polarization in the denomination surrounding their ideology. There remains some confusion and a lack of unity surrounding this topic as of today, though the struggle seems to be relegated to a minority within the Nazarene tribe.

¹⁰ Consider A.M. Hills, *Holiness and Power* (Holiness Data Ministry, 1995), accessed November 26, 2013, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyctr/books/0001-0100/HDM0100.pdf>. This book was the “essential” reading for students entering preparation for ministry in the Church of the Nazarene from 1911—1964 and thus was highly significant in shaping the denomination’s views on holiness, sanctification, and the experience of “second blessing.” Especially significant was Hills’ understanding of sanctification being a moment, an instantaneous blessing, and his omitting any acknowledgement of any potential growth in grace. For additional information, see also: Mark R. Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology: The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene 1905 – 2004* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2004), 30-36.

The purpose of this paper, then, is to help the Church of the Nazarene visualize a deepening of our discipleship (the great commandment) and mission (the great commission) through the lens of John Wesley's means of grace practices.

SECTION 2: OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

The field of scholarly writings on the life of John Wesley, his theological perspective, and his means of grace ideology is extensive. This paper focuses on the role and significance of Wesley's means of grace practices for the Church of the Nazarene today. We examine those practices Wesley espoused as having particular significance for the Christian journey and how Wesley utilized the means of grace (theologically and practically) throughout his lifetime. Through this study we will be better able to bring Wesley's practical theology into a conversation on contemporary spiritual formation and discipleship.¹¹ The task is of utmost importance as we seek to relate these particular practices to people who call themselves Nazarene. This section will review scholarly engagement around Wesley's means of grace ideology.

Most Wesley scholars affirm the significance of Wesley's means of grace for his own theology and practice. Some debate has taken place regarding the various categorizations of Wesley's practices, though this argument is primarily one of semantics—and Wesley himself was inconsistent in his usage during the course of his lifetime.¹² In addition to changing language, Wesley acknowledged that the means of grace practices themselves vary. He writes,

¹¹ In utilizing the term “practical theology” I am in no way insinuating that Wesley's means of grace are concerned only with orthopraxy to the neglect of orthodoxy (as some might be tempted to infer). For a good scholarly dialogue on this, read the following article by Joerg Rieger, “The Means of Grace, John Wesley, and the Theological Dilemma of the Church Today,” *Quarterly Review* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1997-1998): 377-393. See also Randy Maddox, “Practical Theology: A Discipline in Search of a Definition,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18 (1991): 159-169.

¹² While all Wesleyan scholars see numerous means of grace throughout the writings of John Wesley, many use varying phrasing. See footnote 86 on page 33 for more information.

The means into which different men [and women] are led, and in which they find the blessing of God, are varied, transposed, and combined together, a thousand different ways. Yet still our wisdom is to follow the leadings of his providence and his Spirit; to be guided herein, (more especially as to the means wherein we ourselves seek the grace of God,) partly by his outward providence, giving us the opportunity of using sometimes one means, sometimes another, partly by our experience, which it is whereby his free Spirit is pleased most to work in our heart. And in the meantime, the sure and general rule for all who groan for the salvation of God is this,—whenever opportunity serves, use all the means which God has ordained; for who knows in which God will meet thee with the grace that bringeth salvation changeable.¹³

A third way Wesleyan scholarship differs amongst itself, is in the organization and application of particular means of grace practices.¹⁴ The purpose of this section, therefore, is to highlight important scholarly voices and offer a general overview of Wesleyan scholarship with regard to Wesley’s means of grace ideology.

Wesleyan Scholarship: A Broad Overview

In an article entitled, “Means of Grace and Forms of Piety,” found in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, Ted A. Campbell offers insight as to the development of

¹³ John Wesley, *Means of Grace Sermon #16*, V.3. <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-16-the-means-of-grace/>.

¹⁴ Again, these scholars are not necessarily disagreeing. They do, however, approach certain aspects differently. Consider Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Maddox uniquely organizes various means of grace practices through the “three dimensions of saving grace: Prevenient Grace, justifying grace, and sanctifying grace), 201-229. Borrowing from a chapter from James F. White’s *Sacraments as God’s Self Giving*, Rob Staples offers three norms for sacramental practice – namely pastoral, theological, and historical. Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1991), 265-285. Kenneth J. Collins offers that “Wesley’s basic theological orientation... considers Scripture to be the ultimate norm or guide for the Christian life.” Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley’s Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 13. Knight agrees and writes that, for Wesley, “scripture had primacy not only as an authority for theological reflection, but as a context which formed and shaped the Christian life,” Kindle Loc. 2708.

Wesley's means of grace ideology over the course of several years.¹⁵ Campbell points out that when John and Charles Wesley wrote *The General Rules* (1743), they added public worship, the ministry of the Word, and fasting (abstinence) to their previous list in Wesley's "Means of Grace" sermon. Then, it was not until the *Large Minutes* were produced (1785) that the distinctives, "instituted and prudential" means of grace, were noted by Wesley. The article is a particularly helpful overview of Wesley's means of grace practices, particularly his articulation of their historical development, as well as their consideration throughout Wesley's writings.

One of the most exhaustive resources on Wesley's means of grace is Henry H. Knight III's *Practicing the Presence of God: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*.¹⁶ Knight provides a thorough assessment of Wesley's means of grace practices, and offers a practical application of those practices in terms of growth in grace. As Don E. Saliers writes in its introduction, Knight is recognized for the concept that "the means of grace are neither subjective nor metaphysically objective, but relational, remaining both the source and the true object of the religious affections."¹⁷

Randy Maddox is another well-known scholar. His book, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* engages an extensive discussion on the hands-on application of Wesley. Of special emphasis in his work is a balanced synthesis of both

¹⁵ Ted A. Campbell, "Means of Grace and Forms of Piety," in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, James A. Kirby and William J. Abraham, eds. (Jan 2010). DOI 0.1093/oxfordhb/9780199696116.013.0016. Accessed 11/29/2015.

¹⁶ Henry H. Knight, III. *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies, No. 3*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1992. Knight also includes reading devotional classics and all edifying literature in his assessment of Wesley's means.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Kindle Loc. 163.

Eastern and Western theological tenets throughout Wesley's writings, as well as a focus on Wesley's practical theology, with consideration given on how to engage these topics contemporarily.¹⁸ Specifically, Maddox includes a list, though not exhaustive, of a broad range of Wesley's means including "such universal Christian practices as fasting, prayer, Eucharist, and devotional readings with the more distinctively Methodist practices like class meetings, love feasts, and special rules of holy living."¹⁹ In Chapter 8, Maddox engages a discourse on the means and their theological significance; especially noting the particular ways Wesley seems to assume grace is at work. Maddox has written several other books of note, though *Responsible Grace* continues to be one of the most well-known contemporary resources on Wesley.²⁰

Jorge Rieger offers the perspective that Wesley, to some degree, actually prioritized acts of mercy over acts of piety. He claims, "Whenever works of mercy interfere with works of piety, it is the works of mercy that 'are to be preferred.' Wesley explains to the surprised reader that 'even reading, hearing, and prayer are to be omitted, or to be postponed, 'at charity's almighty call'—when we are called to relieve the distress of our neighbor, whether in body or soul."²¹ In this article, Rieger also argues for "the

¹⁸ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

²⁰ See also: Randy Maddox, *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998); Randy Maddox, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, Annotated* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2015).

²¹ Rieger, "The Means of Grace," 380. Here Rieger quotes Wesley Sermon 92: *On Zeal*.

interdependence of orthodoxy and orthopraxy,” in relation to, or “in response to, the triune God’s presence and praxis in the world.”²²

In 2012, Thomas C. Oden published a two-volume synthesis of Wesley’s teaching with the goal of being both faithful to Wesley’s own writings, and accessible to the reader. Oden’s goal was to systematize Wesley’s writings and thought, and as such, he has much to say about the means of grace. First, that human understanding (not just pious inner faith) “must be brought by humility to repentance, true self-knowledge and faith...this restoration is available to all who will gladly receive the means of grace.”²³ Second, in pointing out a serious discrepancy between Wesley and William Law, Oden engages Wesley’s use of the means of grace to stand against “Mystical Universalism,” and quotes Wesley as saying, “There is but one scriptural way wherein we receive inward grace, through the outward means which God has appointed.”²⁴

Third, Oden states that when one loses faith by “lack of trust in God’s righteousness...it may be regained by repentance, using the means of grace, eliciting a lively new reception of grace that elicits works of love.”²⁵ Here, Oden points out that Wesley understood the means of grace to be directly linked to a believer’s ability to trust in God’s righteousness for salvation. Fourth, the concept of participation is underlined in Oden. He writes, “meanwhile, believers learn to cooperate daily with grace by using the

²² Ibid., 389.

²³ Thomas Oden, *John Wesley’s Teachings Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Kindle Loc. 4639-4654.

²⁴ Thomas Oden, *John Wesley’s Teachings Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Kindle Loc. 2359-2373.

²⁵ Ibid., 3007.

means of grace: by searching the Scriptures, which attest the history of grace; by attending Holy Communion, which brings grace near; by becoming attentive to conscience; and by sharing in common prayer, godly admonition, and good counsel.”²⁶ Fifth, that the means of grace are means by which “temptation can be resisted.”²⁷ Sixth, the means of grace are means through which to seek sanctifying grace.²⁸

Kenneth Grider offers a unique perspective. He uses “direct” and “indirect” language, as opposed to instituted/prudential or acts of piety/acts of mercy which are more common in Wesleyan scholarship. Grider includes “Christian suffering” in his discussion on the “various means of grace through which spiritual growth occurs.”²⁹ Grider also includes corporate worship as a direct means of grace, which is scant in many scholarly engagements with Wesley’s means.³⁰

Finally, Gregory Clapper points out an implied tenet of Wesley’s means: that they are, in fact, “appropriate tools” working toward the end. Namely, “in order to achieve the goal of holiness—living completely out of a motivation to love—one has to use the means that will bring about that goal. These means are the means of grace.”³¹

Again, these scholars are not necessarily at odds with each other; when it comes to Wesley’s means of grace, most scholars agree—it is a significant tenet of Wesley’s

²⁶ Oden, *Volume 2*, Loc. 3800.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6305.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6992.

²⁹ Kenneth J. Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), Kindle Loc. 9015.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9183-9214.

³¹ Clapper, *As If The Heart Mattered*, Loc. 1371.

theology, and it offers a profound application for Christ's Church today. Yet, each resource offers a unique and nuanced stage for the voice of Wesley. Every resource listed here provides meaningful insight into Wesley's perspective for the contemporary reader.

Church of the Nazarene Resources

One notable Nazarene resource is the recent publication, *Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm*, edited by Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix.³² The book is a collection of essays written by eighteen different authors, and seeks to approach spiritual formation in a distinctly Wesleyan manner. The essays cover broad topics such as, "Spiritual Formation Defined" by Mark A Maddix and "Holiness and Sanctification as a Wesleyan Paradigm for Spiritual Formation" by Diane Leclerc, as well as more specific topics like, "Communal Worship and the Sacraments" by Brent Peterson; "How to Study the Bible as a Spiritual Practice" by George Lyons; and "Using the Psalms for Spiritual Formation." Throughout the resource, the various authors link Wesley's means of grace practices to the practical needs of Christians pursuing holiness. The book is an excellent example of applied theology; it resources the church well in offering a specifically Wesleyan means of grace perspective for followers of Christ. The resource was primarily written by Nazarenes, and was published by Nazarene Publishing House.

One second example is an older book, *The Upward Call*, by Dee Freeborn. Here, Freeborn links Wesley's ideology to a modern framework of thinking. He makes the claim that spiritual formation and the Wesleyan teaching of holiness are essentially

³² Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix, eds. *Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011).

likeminded in their “mutual concern for holy living,” and goes on to say that for both, “the standard is Christlikeness.”³³ He states,

The essence of the Wesleyan doctrine of holiness has to do with the restoration of the image of God in humanity expressed in *Christlikeness*, and the goal of spiritual formation is to bring the believer to such Christlikeness that it is appropriate to speak of Christ being formed in the believer’s heart. This tradition is 2,000 years old, or at least as old as Paul’s letter to the Galatians in which he wrote: ‘My little children, with whom I am again in travail *until Christ be formed in you!*’³⁴

Freeborn is fundamentally making the claim that to be faithfully Wesleyan, it is crucial to understand the purpose or goal of all spiritual formation is Christlikeness. He then directly links some means of grace practices namely: worship, study of the Word of God, prayer, meditation, and journaling to the pursuit of holiness through spiritual formation.³⁵

An older resource, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*, by Rob Staples, is a substantial resource on a Wesleyan Holiness view of the sacraments. Here Staples focuses primarily on baptism and Eucharist. However, he offers several key insights into the significance of the means of grace broadly, including the idea that the means of grace “promote the subsequent ongoing development of the holy life.”³⁶ One interesting distinctive regarding Staples contribution to this discussion is two dangers he notes. First, that Wesley’s means of grace practices will be understood “mechanically,” or “that the

³³ Dee Freeborn, *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation and the Holy Life* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), Kindle Loc. 64.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 72. Galatians 4:19 (RSV). Emphasis mine.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 666.

³⁶ Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*, 98.

spirit can only be given through such mechanical means.”³⁷ And second, those that would see the means “as a barrier in our relation to God.”³⁸

Brent Peterson offers a different note of concern: “We have so focused on individual experiences and quantifiable ‘works of grace’ that we have lost sight of the communal reality of our faith.”³⁹ Through the lens of the Eucharist, Peterson calls the Church to reimagine our communal Kingdom vision and take a stand against what he calls “Christian individualism.”

Finally, Dean Blevins has offered extensive writings on how Wesley’s means of grace practices are an appropriate lens through which to view Christian religious education. Blevins’ Ph.D. dissertation, *John Wesley and the Means of Grace: A Christian Education Approach*, offers insight into the ways Wesley’s means of grace can “offset the influence of American evangelicalism” and offer each participant some level of self-knowledge and knowledge of God.⁴⁰ Blevins has also written several articles, many found in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, expounding on the research he compiled for his doctoral work. Each article offers the Church a unique insight into the practical application of Wesley, specifically how Wesley’s means of grace practices partner with Christian religious education.

³⁷ Ibid., 99.

³⁸ Ibid., 100.

³⁹ Brent Peterson, “Eucharistic Ecclesiology: A Community of Joyful Brokenness,” accessed November 2, 2015, <https://www.whdl.org/sites/default/files/EucharisticEcclesiology.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Dean Blevins, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace: An Approach to Christian Religious Education,” (PhD diss., Claremont School of Theology, 1999).

The Church of the Nazarene Manual and the Means

Every four years, the Nazarene church sets out officially to establish and reaffirm its polity and policy. Elected clergy and laity gather together to worship, pray, review, challenge, support, and edit the church's official statement, culminated in the *Manual*. The writing of the *Manual* is a corporate endeavor; it is a product of the communal gathering of global church leadership. Changes to the *Manual* go through an extensive process designed to allow the global church to participate.⁴¹

Throughout the *Manual*, the phrase "means of grace" appears six times, and is never explained theologically or practically. This is a significant oversight; the means of grace practices are *assumed* to be significantly formative though they are never explained or applied. This deficiency makes it difficult to determine the church's official perspective on Wesley's means and their importance to Nazarene worship and ideology. The first reference to the means comes in the context of the church's definition of entire sanctification.⁴² The church writes:

We believe that the grace of entire sanctification includes the divine impulse to grow in grace as a Christlike disciple. However, this impulse must be consciously nurtured, and careful attention given to the requisites and processes of spiritual development and improvement in Christlikeness of character and personality. Without such purposeful endeavor, one's witness may be impaired and the grace itself frustrated and ultimately lost. Participating in the means of grace, especially

⁴¹ For instance, if any part of the Constitution of the Church, printed in the *Manual*, is going to be altered, it can only do so by a two-thirds vote of the General Assembly, and it must be also ratified by "not less than" two-thirds of all Phase 3 and Phase 2 districts worldwide. See: Church of the Nazarene *Manual: 2009-2013*, Article 32, 43.

⁴² Church of the Nazarene, *Manual: 2013-2017*, Article X, 33-34.

the fellowship, disciplines, and sacraments of the Church, believers grow in grace and in wholehearted love to God and neighbor.⁴³

Here, the church insinuates that the means of grace allows one to purposefully continue their growth in grace as a Christ-like disciple, especially through “fellowship, disciplines and sacraments of the Church.” What specific activities would be included, or how they encourage growth, is not specifically stated. That they are significant is assumed, while many other practices and doctrines are referred to by manual paragraph for further study.⁴⁴

The second reference to “means of grace” comes in a section called “The Covenant of Christian Character,” whereby the actions and lifestyle of a Christian are understood. Here, the church writes:

Attending faithfully to all the ordinances of God, and the means of grace, including the public worship of God (Hebrews 10:25), the ministry of the Word (Acts 2:42), the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-30); searching the scriptures and meditating thereon (Acts 17:11; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-16); family and private devotions (Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Matthew 6:6).⁴⁵

This definition alludes to a more practical application of the means of grace, however it still leaves the phrase, and its significance, undefined. The practices listed go beyond the

⁴³ Ibid., Paragraph 14, 33-34.

⁴⁴ This happens often throughout the church’s *Manual*. Consider this statement, “Biblical marriage only exists in a relationship involving one man and one woman. (30-30.1, 32 514.10, 536.16), Kindle Loc. 926. Here the numbers in the parenthesis are provided for further information, and reference additional places within the *Manual* this statement is flushed out. Another example, in the section on Stewardship reads, “In disbursing to meet the requirements of the local, district, educational, and general programs of the Church of the Nazarene, local churches are urged to adopt and practice a financial apportionment plan, and to pay general, educational, and district apportionments monthly.” (130, 154, 155-155.2, 515.13), Kindle Loc. 1028. The list of such examples that appear throughout the *Manual* could be lengthy. These two are mentioned here as brief examples of the pattern in the *Manual* to cross reference important information for its readers. It is the belief of this author that it is a significant oversight in the Church of the Nazarene *Manual* to mention the means of grace, and imply their significance, but never give them appropriate explanation.

⁴⁵ Church of the Nazarene *Manual: 2009-2013*, 39.

first list, however these are but a small portion of disciplines John Wesley identified as being significant. No indication is given as to why these are included and others are overlooked.

In its discussion of the roles of the local pastor, administering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, "at least once a quarter," is directed. The church encourages pastors to "move toward a more frequent celebration of this means of grace."⁴⁶ However, pastors are only required to administer communion quarterly. John Wesley, on the other hand, observed the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as often as he was able and strongly admonished others to do the same.⁴⁷ There appears to be a much different perspective between the church's official stance and that of Wesley when it comes to Communion.

In its "reception of church members" section, the pastor is instructed to lead the new members in the following statement:

Desiring to unite with the Church of the Nazarene, do you covenant to give yourself to the fellowship and work of God in connection with it, as set forth in the Covenant of Christian Conduct of the Church of the Nazarene? Will you endeavor in every way to glorify God, by a humble walk, godly conversation, and holy service; by devotedly giving of your means; by faithful attendance upon the *means of grace*; and abstaining from all evil, will you seek earnestly to perfect holiness of heart and life in the fear of the Lord?⁴⁸

Because the means of grace are practices all new Nazarene church members agree to "faithfully attend to," it can be assumed the Church values these practices as being both significant and formative. However what is actually meant by "means of grace"

⁴⁶ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁷ John Wesley, *The Duty of Constant Communion #101*, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-101-the-duty-of-constant-communion>.

⁴⁸ Church of the Nazarene, *Manual: 2009-2013*, 246-251. Emphasis mine.

remains largely undefined, and that in itself can lead to misinterpretation or differing perspectives. An essentially identical statement is agreed to when a local Church of the Nazarene is officially organized and welcomed into a District of Churches.⁴⁹

Again, it is significant to note, that though the church values Wesley's means of grace practices, it does not adequately articulate *what* the means of grace are (which practices are significant enough to be included), *how* these means should be engaged, or *why* they are particularly significant. It is interesting that the means of grace are both mentioned and assumed in the Nazarene manual, and yet they are not explained. Apparently, there is open interpretation on how and why the Church would engage these practices. This has led to a variety of differences in how Nazarenes engage Wesley's means of grace throughout the denomination.

Alternative Sources of Discipleship

The polity and programming of the Church of the Nazarene allude to its priorities. In lieu of Wesley's means of grace practices, the church emphasizes other practices of formation to help believers pursue of holiness of heart and life.⁵⁰ For instance, the Church

⁴⁹ Ibid., 266.

⁵⁰ Consider *Grace and Peace Magazine*, a quarterly magazine for Nazarene pastors; whose stated purpose is to "increase ministry effectiveness, stimulate theological and missional reflection, and promote healthy dialogue among its print and online readership." www.graceandpeacemagazine.org/about. A quick search for "means of grace" content yields a varied result, with limited articles addressing the practical engagement of Wesley's means of grace practices. Those articles that do, approach the content from a broader context. For instance, "John Wesley and Influences on His Theological Outlook: An Interview with Ted A. Campbell" (Issue 12; Winter, 2016), includes some conversation about Wesley's means of grace, though it is couched in a conversation about the things that influenced and shaped Wesley's own theology. See: <http://www.graceandpeacemagazine.org/articles/170-issue-12-winter-2016/456-john-wesley-and-influences-on-his-theological-outlook-an-interview-with-ted-a-cambell>. Consider also the Nazarene Publishing House. See: www.nph.com. In the past five years they have published a limited number of books or resources on Wesley, and only one is related to Wesley's means of grace. Richard E. Buckner, 30

highly values discipleship. It administers an entire department dedicated to programs of discipleship with the purpose of “making Christlike disciples...for a lifetime of Christian holiness.”⁵¹ The church also prioritizes age-level ministries in the local congregation, and throughout its corporate programming, intends to provide spiritual growth and depth in the lives of people attending Nazarene churches worldwide.⁵²

A brief overview of the Church’s official website reveals it seeks to provide the necessary resources to encourage seekers toward a life of holiness. It should be noted, however, that there is a significant absence of teaching about, explanation, or utilization of Wesley’s means of grace practices for holiness formation. A connection between the Church’s spiritual life and Wesley’s rhythms of grace certainly seems to be implied. However, the church does not explicitly connect John Wesley’s means of grace with the spiritual life and health of its people, or offer the means as a dynamic spiritual formation paradigm.

In faithfulness to Wesley’s views, is it reasonable to ask the Church of the Nazarene to expand on this Wesleyan tenet? Is it possible that a renewal of Wesley’s language for Christian formation can provide a fresh way of engaging Christian discipleship and holiness for a new generation? The focus of the next section is to explore

Days With Wesley: A Prayer Book (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2012). The resource looks at prayer as a “special” means of grace, and claims Wesley did as well. However, if one were to search the Nazarene Publishing House website for resources on Wesley’s means of grace, one would find content surrounding the life and theology of John Wesley, not practical resources to help the church engage his means of grace practices, or understand them theologically.

⁵¹ <http://nazarene.org/ministries/ssm/display.html>.

⁵² <http://thediscipleshipplace.org>. The Discipleship Place is a website created to equip lay-leaders in the Church of the Nazarene. It offers a series of webinars available for personal and corporate training. Various age-level ministries are aptly represented: Children’s ministries, youth ministries, young adult ministries, singles ministries, “Prime-time” ministries (ministry to retired individuals and couples), small group ministries, etc.

what benefits are available to the church if it chooses to more specifically and practically implement Wesley's means of grace practices.

SECTION 3: MEANS OF GRACE AS FORMATIVE HOLINESS

“‘By grace are ye saved’: Ye are saved from your sins, from the guilt and power thereof, ye are restored to the favour and image of God, not for any works, merits, or deservings of yours, but by the free grace, the mere mercy of God, through the merits of his well-beloved Son: Ye are thus saved, not by any power, wisdom, or strength, which is in you, or in any other creature; but merely through the grace or power of the Holy Ghost, which worketh all in all. . . . And, in fact, he hath not left us undetermined; he hath shown us the way wherein we should go. We have only to consult the oracles of God; to inquire what is written there; and, if we simply abide by their decision, there can no possible doubt remain. According to this, according to the decision of holy writ all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the means which he hath ordained; in using, not in laying them aside.”⁵³

Throughout the course of his life, John Wesley was a prolific writer.⁵⁴ And, evidently, as Randy Maddox points out, “Wesley’s interest in the means of grace spanned his life and pervades his writings.”⁵⁵ Wesley did not ever articulate a comprehensive list of the “means of grace”; however he did say, “By ‘means of grace’ I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.”⁵⁶ Followers of Wesley have summarized this sentiment by referring to “outward signs of inward grace.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Wesley, *On the Means of Grace* #16, II.8-III.1

⁵⁴ According to the denominational website of the United Methodist Church, John Wesley’s writings are considered “prolific” due to their breath and volume. In addition to the books, journals, and letters of John Wesley, he also “printed several volumes of his sermons throughout his lifetime.” See: <http://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/Title-Index>.

⁵⁵ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 192.

⁵⁶ Wesley, *Means of Grace*. II.1.

⁵⁷ This phrase is particularly Wesleyan in that John Wesley used this phrase in specific reference to the sacraments (specifically the Lord’s Supper), but it has come to a broader understanding in subsequent Wesleyan circles where many use the phrase in reference to any “means of grace,” sacrament, or Christian discipline.

Because Wesley never synthesized an inclusive list of means of grace practices, it is complicated to engage the topic systematically. This section claims that the praxis of Wesley's means of grace offers meaningful insight to individuals and congregations who desire to pursue holiness of heart and life, a foundational tenet of Wesleyan theology. In this section, a brief history of the Nazarene denomination is presented, in order to show the Church's spiritual connection with Wesley. Then, Wesley's means are discussed holistically, their general theological tenets are presented, and an overall picture of the means is offered. The means are then briefly described and synthesized into a manageable list of practices.

The discussion offers clear implications of these particular practices both theologically and practically. Those practices are then applied directly to the problem statement of this paper: that some within the Nazarene denomination have prioritized Wesley's theology, ignoring the practical patterns of engagement needed to pursue authentic holiness of heart and life. By neglecting Wesley's means of grace practices as an accessible model of holiness formation, the Church has overlooked a significant opportunity to invite its members to rediscover the necessity of personal and corporate participation in God's grace at work in and through our lives. Therefore, a majority of this section will focus on a distinctly Wesleyan understanding of the means of grace, giving particular attention to the writings and theology of John Wesley. The purpose of this section is to help the Church of the Nazarene reimagine what the pursuit of holiness might look like specifically through the lens of John Wesley and his means of grace ideology. To do that, a brief overview of the history of the Church of the Nazarene is needed as we begin.

Background: Nazarene Spirituality

The pursuit of Christian holiness is a significant, subversive, consequential, and critical journey for every Christian. At least, that seems to have been the perspective of many “Holiness” Christians in the late-19th and early-20th centuries in the United States of America.⁵⁸ Specifically, it has been a core assumption of the Church of the Nazarene since its beginnings.⁵⁹ The Nazarene Church, from its earliest days, has propagated an understanding that this quest for holiness, or entire sanctification, or baptism with the Holy Spirit (as a second work of grace), is not only offered to every believer but is foundational and fundamental to every follower of Christ.⁶⁰

Therefore, the concepts of entire sanctification, holiness, perfection, a holy life, and perfect love are essential doctrines for and of the Church of the Nazarene.⁶¹ These foundational tenets become a dynamic consideration when wrestling with the role and significance of Wesley’s means of grace practices for the Church of the Nazarene. It is

⁵⁸ J.B. Chapman, *A History of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1926); Stan Ingersol et al., *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2009), 10-11; Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology*, 1-15; “Church of the Nazarene - Holiness People,” accessed November 27, 2013, <http://nazarene.org/ministries/administration/visitorcenter/values/holiness/display.html>.

⁵⁹ Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology*, 1-15.

⁶⁰ E.F. Walker, ed., *Manual of the History, Doctrine, Government, and Ritual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, MO: Pentecostal Nazarene Publishing House, 1915), 10; J.B. Chapman, *A History of the Church of the Nazarene*, 18.

⁶¹ P.F. Bresee, *Manual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene 1908: Reprint Edition* (Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2010)

important to note that this Wesleyan perspective on Christian maturity—a heart wholly devoted to God—has been crucial to the Church of the Nazarene since its inception.⁶²

In his anthology of the church’s early years, Timothy Smith points out several things that set the Nazarenes apart from other denominations. He notes the significance that the first *Manual* incorporated “standards of personal behavior...into the ritual for the reception of church members, making each such ceremony a reminder to all of the vows they had taken on joining.”⁶³ New members were encouraged to “walk in ‘hearty fellowship’ with the church, and not to rail against its doctrines and usages.”⁶⁴ This included “avoiding every kind of evil” (with six particular examples stated), and “by doing that which is enjoined in the word of God.” Specifically, “by loving God with all the heart, mind, and strength, a faithful attendance upon all the ordinances of God, and the means of grace; such as the public worship of God, the ministry of the Word, the

⁶² Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 283-284. I am also greatly indebted to Dr. Mark H. Mann from the Wesleyan Center at Point Loma Nazarene University for pointing out a strong distinctive on this account. For many in the Nazarene heritage, the term “Wesleyan” is directly correlated to our understanding of sanctification being a second work of grace, and from our earliest understandings this would also include the language of an “eradication of sin.” For some, however, the term “Wesleyan” is used in a broad sense to infer *more* than just identifying with John Wesley. While it is certainly a way of identifying with his theology on sanctification and of a “second work of grace,” it is also a term used to identify “us” as “not Calvinist” or “Keswickian.” (Calvinist in this setting refers to John Calvin, and the subsequent theology of his followers – primarily their views on “predestination” and a “secure salvation.” Keswick in this context refers to understanding sanctification as a “power over sin” rather than an “eradication” of it). In other words, for some, being “Wesleyan” is more opaque and in their understanding the term is used broadly and with ambiguity.

⁶³ Timothy Smith, *Called Unto Holiness: The Story of the Nazarenes: The Formative Years* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), Kindle Loc. 1970-2051.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Sacraments, searching the Scriptures and meditating thereon, family and private devotions.”⁶⁵

As Ingersol points out, “The church’s ‘particular identity’ [is] still defined by its ‘calling to exemplify, teach, and preach a particular facet of that redemptive history—holiness of heart and life,’ as historian Paul Basset said in 2002.”⁶⁶ And, Mark Quanstrom offers that “the ritual for receiving members into the church has remained essentially unchanged since the denomination’s beginnings...”⁶⁷ Quanstrom continues:

According to the membership ritual of the Church of the Nazarene, perfecting the holiness of heart and life is contingent on participation in the life of the general church – and then as a part of that community – on humility, godly conversation, participation in ministry, stewardship, and, in particular, faithfulness to the means of grace. Growing in Christlikeness is not an individual endeavor but is rather recognized as a communal responsibility. Participation in the life of the church is absolutely essential for perfecting holiness, and the clear implication of this covenantal agreement is that without this kind of faithfulness to the church, Christlikeness is impossible.⁶⁸

If these two church historians are correct, then holiness of heart and life, Christlikeness, and entire sanctification have always been crucial tenets in and for the Church of the Nazarene. And yet, the nuances of these themes have not always been agreed upon, and there is no consensus about their implications. Keep in mind, the Church of the Nazarene has a complex history. It is a Wesleyan-Holiness church,

⁶⁵ Ibid., Loc. 2014-2051. From this context, we can see that Wesley’s means of grace were valued in the Church of the Nazarene from its conception; here several specific means are listed.

⁶⁶ Ingersol et al, *Our Watchword and Song*, 605. Here, Ingersol is quoting Dr. Paul Bassett, who spoke at the Global Nazarene Conference in April 2002. The remarks quoted here can be found in his address at <http://wesley.nnu.edu/2002-GNTC>. Accessed December 20, 2015.

⁶⁷ Mark Quanstrom, *From Grace to Grace: the Transforming Power of Holiness* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2011), 113.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 114.

conceived within the American Holiness Movement of the 19th century, born towards the beginning of the 20th century, and indebted deeply to the Wesleyan revival in England approximately a century and a half previous.⁶⁹ According to Stan Ingersol, a Church of the Nazarene historian, “Nazarenes have always understood they are direct spiritual and theological heirs of the Wesley’s.”⁷⁰ The person and works of John and Charles Wesley are significant to people who call themselves Nazarenes. The magnitude of their influence (in practical matters as well as theology) cannot be overstated.⁷¹ Yet, the history of the Nazarene Church has also been rightly referred to as “a history of unions.”⁷² The story, in brief, revolves around an apparent movement towards unity, across the United States of America, near the end of the 19th century, for those Christians for whom holiness had become somewhat of a battle cry.⁷³ The Church of the Nazarene is a direct product of that trend. It was a coming together of believers from many traditions, all of whom had a deep longing for fellowship with like-minded believers.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Chapman, *A History of the Church of the Nazarene*; Ingersol et al., *Our Watchword and Song*; Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology*.

⁷⁰ Ingersol et al., *Our Watchword and Song*, 18.

⁷¹ A variety of American-Holiness perspectives also greatly influenced the first hundred years of the denomination. Consider Ingersol et al, *Our Watchword and Song*, 11-13. The Relationship between the Church of the Nazarene, the Wesleyan Revival of the 18th century, and the American Holiness movement is muddled at best. The scholarship noted in this paper is intended to show the nuances of influences within the Church of the Nazarene throughout the first century of its existence. This paper is also arguing for the significance of Wesley’s influence on the Church of the Nazarene throughout its history (though sometimes this is overlooked), asserting the need for a continued revitalization of Wesley’s perspective for the Church.

⁷² Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology*, 13.

⁷³ Ingersol et al., *Our Watchword and Song*, 9-163.

⁷⁴ Chapman, *A History of the Church of the Nazarene*, 20-23; Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology*, 1-15. It should be noted that while the theology of Wesley was formative to the Church of the Nazarene, it was not the only considerable influence to the Church (throughout its beginnings or since). Because the Church of the Nazarene was also a coming together of many believers from many different

Quanstrom aptly points out that early holiness leaders believed they had found the secret for uniting all of Christendom: holiness of heart and life. They believed that where other doctrinal issues caused division, holiness doctrine united.⁷⁵ From very early on, “the rallying cry of the early Nazarenes was unity in essentials; liberty in nonessentials,” and this sentiment was inextricably tethered to the doctrine of “entire sanctification.”⁷⁶

History has revealed this optimistic vision of collaboration and harmony across all of Christendom to be profoundly shortsighted. However, the enthusiasm for holiness was the foundational motivator for much of the American Holiness movement (in the late 19th century), and is apparent in the roots of the Church of the Nazarene (throughout the early decades of the 20th century).⁷⁷ In one of its earliest publications church leaders wrote, “There is one pro-eminent thing in this universe; it is the nature of God and the supreme possibility of men—Holiness. God’s nature makes it a necessity, by the blood of his Son he makes it a possibility, by his own personal presence as the Ghost Most Holy he makes it an experience.”⁷⁸

From the pivotal “coming together” of holiness churches, associations, peoples, and establishments at Pilot Point, Texas in 1908, and throughout the next century and beyond, the Church of the Nazarene pursued an agenda of being “set apart.” The church

perspectives and theological traditions, a variety of nuanced ideology has shaped the Church’s perspective. A pursuit of holiness was certainly the unifying theme of the Church from its earliest days, though many voices inspired what that looked like and how that was lived out.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁷⁶ Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology*, 29.

⁷⁷ Chapman, *A History of the Church of the Nazarene*; Ingersol et al., *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene*; Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology: The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene 1905 – 2004*.

⁷⁸ Geo. W. Wilson, “Holiness,” *Nazarene Messenger*, November 19, 1908, 17.

purposefully established itself in the Wesleyan tradition of orthodox Christianity, and the Wesleyan doctrine of salvation, including entire sanctification of believers, became the foundation for its theological perspective.⁷⁹

In 1908, Phineas Bresee, a founding father of the church, published a portion of a conversation he had with a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in the *Nazarene Messenger*. In response to the question, which he claims to have faced often in those early years, “What is the difference between the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene and the Methodist Church?” he wrote that the Church of the Nazarene was more “methodistic than the Methodist church,” inferring that the Nazarene Church existed because the Methodist church had, to a large degree, “ceased to be Wesleyan.”⁸⁰ He claimed specifically that Methodist preachers were no longer preaching “what John Wesley understood by Christian Perfection or Perfect Love.”⁸¹ He went on to say:

I explained to him that the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene is Wesleyan, and as I believe thus fully Scriptural on this great doctrine of perfect love or entire sanctification. That we believe that the great dispensational truth is, that Jesus Christ baptizes believers with the Holy Ghost, sanctifying and empowering them.

⁷⁹ Wesley Tracy and Stan Ingersol, *What Is a Nazarene? Understanding Our Place in the Religious Community* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2013), Kindle Loc. 138. By 1915, the young Nazarene church had emerged “as the primary ingathering denomination of the Wesleyan-Holiness revival” and had absorbed much of the established “holiness people” across the United States of America. See: Ingersol, *Our Watchword and Song*, 193. To be sure, a majority of these were from Methodist congregations. However, it is significant to note this movement was not limited to separation from one specific denomination. Timothy Smith points out, “None of these parent bodies had originated simply as secessions from the Methodist church...they were, rather, products of a spiritual awakening which during the previous half-century had cultivated among many denominations the doctrine and experience of Christian perfection, or entire sanctification.” Timothy L. Smith, *Called Unto Holiness*, Kindle Loc. 89. Quansstrom clarifies that the “founding fathers” of the Church of the Nazarene actually “included Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Friends, Methodists, and Advent Christians.” See: Quansstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology*, 28.

⁸⁰ Nazarene Messenger, July 15, 1909, 6, accessed November 20, 2014, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/147894965/Nazarene-Messenger-July-15-1909>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

That without this we have no distinctive dispensational truth, and that where this, in substance, is not preached, we have no real gospel. That we feel ourselves a part of that body of believers raised up to “spread Scriptural holiness over these lands,” and thus that we are a part of that company who are the real successors of John Wesley and the early Methodists.⁸²

We can infer from this article that the leaders of the Church of the Nazarene fundamentally asserted that the denomination existed, not only as a holiness church, but primarily as one in the stream of Wesleyan spirituality.⁸³ It is particularly noteworthy that from the beginning, the denomination self-identified as being distinctively Wesleyan. It can therefore be deduced that Wesleyan theology was primarily essential to the Church of the Nazarene’s early identity. And, as we will come to see, the scope of Wesley’s theological and practical influence can also be helpful for the church as it moves into the 21st century and beyond. Primarily significant is Wesley’s practical engagement with the means of grace, practices he understood to be crucial in the formation of holiness within the life of every believer.

The Means of Grace Broadly

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ For a particularly helpful resource on this topic, see Ingersol, *Nazarene Roots*, Chapter 2. Ingersol quotes several early Nazarene’s on this topic. “Scratch a real Nazarene and you will touch an original Methodist; skin a genuine Methodist, and behold a Nazarene!” wrote E.F. Walker, a former Presbyterian. Theologian A.M. Hills, who came to the Nazarenes from the Congregational Church, extolled the Methodist inheritance, claiming that the Nazarenes constituted ‘the fairest flower...in the Methodist garden, the most promising ecclesiastical daughter the prolific Mother Methodism has ever given to the world.’ Wesleyan identity was nurtured deliberately in the early years through the Course of Study, a list of books over which ministers were examined before ordination...the requirements were designed to nurture a Wesleyan identity among Nazarene ministers and keep the church on a path of continuity with its spiritual and theological inheritance” (54-55). However, it should also be noted that while Phineas Bresee is looked to as the church’s earliest “leader,” some scholars disagree there was a wide-spread unity around the idea that the Church of the Nazarene was going to be (in practice) more Wesleyan than that Methodists. Consider J.B. Chapman, *A History of the Church of the Nazarene* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1926).

It must be understood that the phrase “means of grace” holds particularly weighty implications. One cannot understand practices of the means of grace apart from wrestling with the underlying significance of their invitation. Wesley, as is widely noted, spent his life and ministry calling Christ’s Church to holiness. What exactly he meant by “holiness” has been debated; yet there remains a clear call in his writings that Christians would recognize what Wesley defined as the “absolute impossibility of being half a Christian;” therefore, all Christians are to be “all-devoted to God.”⁸⁴ It would logically follow, then, that any practices or disciplines central to Wesley’s theology and praxis would encourage or lead a person toward that end, what Wesley describes as “an uniform following of Christ, an entire inward and outward conformity to our Master.”⁸⁵

To start, it should be noted that Wesleyan scholarship uses a variety of language when referencing Wesley’s means of grace. Some authors use “instituted, prudential and general” means of grace, and some use “particular and ordinary” means of grace language, while others use “acts of piety, acts of mercy” terminology to refer to specific means of grace practices.⁸⁶ In addition, Wesley often uses the word, “ordinances.” As

⁸⁴ Mark K. Olson, *John Wesley’s ‘A Plain Account of Christian Perfection:’ The Annotated Edition*, (Fenwick, MI: TruthInHeart.com, 2005), 27.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸⁶ There is some debate surrounding the categorizations of Wesley’s means of grace. While all Wesleyan scholars see various means of grace in the writings of John Wesley, some use the phrasing “instituted and prudential” while others key on Wesley’s later more practical titles of “works of piety and works of mercy.” Some group together “instituted and works of piety” and “prudential and works of mercy.” Others see clear distinction in Wesley between these categories and assert these are not synonyms. For our purposes here, we will follow the scholarship of those who combine the phrases into three broad themes (instituted, prudential, and general means of grace) so as to give a general overview of Wesley’s perspective as simply and clearly as possible. Understanding, of course, that others might argue for even further distinctions. See: Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, Kindle Loc. 257-270; Diane Leclerc, “Finding the Means to the End: Christian Discipleship and Formation Practices,” in *Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm*, ed. Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2001),

Blevins points out, “It is generally supposed that the ‘means of grace’ and ‘the ordinances of God’ are equivalent terms.”⁸⁷ These phrases are interchangeable throughout Wesley, and are used at different times of Wesley’s life. The confusion apparently comes from Wesley himself, having never systematically articulated an authoritative list of spiritual practices according to intentional categories of definition.⁸⁸

While many Wesleyan scholars have written extensively about the theological and practical implications of John Wesley’s means of grace, categorizing the practices has not been consistent. There appears to be a consensus amongst scholars that Wesley himself used variable language in discussing the numerous tenets of means of grace. It is important to note: rather than develop a systematic theology of the means by which we participate in God’s grace, Wesley inferred a lot of value in “the means” throughout his writings, and used diverse language in different contexts.

74-86. For a more detailed and critical exploration of Wesley’s categories or headings, see: Andrew Carl Thompson, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace: Historical and Theological Context” (D.Th. diss., Divinity School of Duke University, 2012), 138. Thompson points out that Wesley adopts the categories of instituted and prudential means of grace from John Norris’ *Treatise Concerning Christian Perfection*. Another categorization of Wesley is found in Henry H. Knight, *Practicing the Presence of God in the Christian Life*, Loc. 169-391. Knight distinguishes what he calls several “typologies” in Wesley’s engagement with the means of grace, including “general and particular” and “instituted (or ordinary) and prudential.” See also: Dean Blevins, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace: An Approach to Christian Religious Education” (PhD diss., Claremont School of Theology, 1999). Slightly more debated, but of equal importance, is the distinction some have articulated of a third category, known as general means of grace. “Far more well-known are the instituted means of grace and prudential means of grace, two categories that Wesley develops in more detail. Yet a close reading of the material Wesley does provide on the general means of grace reveals that they are of great importance to his understanding of the efficacy of the means of grace generally in practical discipleship.” Andrew C. Thompson, “The General Means of Grace,” *Methodist History* 51, no 4 (July 2013): 249.

⁸⁷ Dean Blevins, “The Means of Grace,” 176. See also: John Wesley, *On Visiting the Sick #98*, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-98-on-visiting-the-sick/>.

⁸⁸ “Wesley did not develop a theology which he then applied: *he participated in a range of practices which became both the source and object of his theological reflection.*” Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 6.

For Wesley, the most foundational concept for all followers of Christ is not that we observe a checklist of activities needed to accomplish, but rather that our hearts would intentionally seek God, so as to encounter and be shaped by his powerful grace, for the end of loving God and neighbor both more and better. Knight contends this is particularly significant for Wesley because of his opposition to irresistible grace: “For [Wesley] the Christian life is constituted by a relationship with God; hence grace is not only the means to that life, but the Christian life is itself *essentially graced*.”⁸⁹ Knight goes on to argue it is precisely at this theological point that “Wesley envisioned a free and dynamic relationship with God in which divine activity enabled and invited human activity, and human participation was essential if the relationship was to grow and deepen.”⁹⁰ Most scholars agree: for Wesley, the means of grace are crucial opportunities for followers of Christ to encounter God’s grace; first because these are practices Christ himself has ordained, and second as the believer intentionally engages these practices, they are given the opportunity to participate with God’s grace at work in their lives in a dynamic way.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Consider these scholarly perspectives: “I shall argue that it is the necessity of experiencing the presence and identity of God in a relationship with God that implicitly underlies Wesley’s insistence on the patterning of the means of grace.” Knight, *The Presence of God*, 11. “Wesley understood the means of grace to be practices through which God’s pardoning and empowering Presence is truly communicated to us for the healing of our sin-diseased nature, as well as exercises that co-operantly nurture this healing.” Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 201-202. “...the ‘means of grace and ‘ordinances’ embrace a variety of Christian practices that have been either explicitly authorized in Christian tradition and Scripture or have been found helpful for Christians as means by which they experience divine grace.” Campbell, Ted A. “Means of Grace and Forms of Piety.” “It is crucial to understand that we do not earn God’s grace in any way by attending to the means of grace. Wesley is clear that nothing but the blood of Christ atones for sin. But participating in the means is the way that was ordained if we are to grow in our relationship with God.” Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 263.

To simplify, this paper uses the categories of “instituted, prudential, and general means of grace.” They are respectively: 1) those activities understood to have been ordained or instituted in Scripture; 2) those practices helpful and formative for all believers; and 3) those “broad approaches to the practice of the faith that require an intentional awareness of one’s motivations in thought, word, and action.”⁹² Since Wesley appears to focus more heavily on the instituted means of grace, and wrote most extensively about those particular practices “appointed by God as means of grace,”⁹³ a majority of this conversation will focus on the dynamics of Wesley’s instituted means of grace. As Ole Borgen notes, “The instituted means are of the greatest importance for Wesley, as specifically appointed by God for the purpose of being channels of God’s giving and preserving a life of faith and holiness.”⁹⁴

So then, what are the means of grace? In Sermon 16 on “The Means of Grace,” Wesley asks a probing question: “Are there, under the Christian dispensation, any means ordained of God, as the usual channels of his grace?”⁹⁵ Wesley cautions, “This question could never have been proposed in the apostolical church, unless by one who openly avowed himself to be a [H]eathen; the whole body of Christians being agreed, that Christ had ordained certain outward means, for conveying his grace into the souls of men.”⁹⁶

⁹² Thompson, “General Means of Grace,” 250.

⁹³ Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 3.

⁹⁴ Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments: A Definitive Study of John Wesley’s Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1972), 105.

⁹⁵ Wesley, *Means of Grace #16*.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, I.1. Or, as Dr. Tom Noble notes, “John Wesley was widely read and deeply immersed in the church Fathers and was an Oxford scholar who read the Fathers and the Scriptures in the original

Apparently, Wesley was concerned that true followers of Christ would encounter God's grace in a dynamic, life-transforming way. According to Dean Blevins, "The means of grace became a standard phrase for Wesley in Methodist polity and ministry."⁹⁷

One crucial tenant of the means is they are "ordained" of Christ and hold some sort of "conveying" power. For Wesley, it is not an assumption that grace indwells any particular practice, discipline, or ritual itself, but rather that there are specific practices through which Christ imparts and/or conveys his grace. All who would wish to encounter God in a meaningful way, and to receive his grace, can employ these means. And, if approached with the appropriate humility and willingness to change, every person can expect to encounter something dynamic and life-breathing in engaging these practices.⁹⁸

In his Sermon 98: *On Visiting the Sick*, Wesley writes,

We commonly mean by that expression [the means of grace and the ordinances of God], those that are usually termed, works of piety; viz., hearing and reading the Scripture, receiving the Lord's Supper, public and private prayer, and fasting. And it is certain these are the ordinary channels which convey the grace of God to the souls of men. But are they the only means of grace? Are there no other means than these, whereby God is pleased, frequently, yea, ordinarily, to convey his grace to them that either love or fear him? Surely there are works of mercy, as well as works of piety, which are real means of grace. They are more especially such to those that perform them with a single eye. And those that neglect them, do not receive the grace which otherwise they might. Yea, and they lose, by a continued neglect, the grace which they had received.⁹⁹

languages." T.A. Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People. The Historic Doctrine of Christian Perfecting* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 3. Thus, we can infer that John Wesley was not merely pointing to his contemporary theologians and their 18th century worldview when he refers to "whole body of Christians," but that he was implying a unified and distinctly Christian thought, as he understood it, from throughout the ages of Christendom in this profound statement.

⁹⁷ Blevins, "John Wesley and the Means of Grace," 173.

⁹⁸ This assertion is directly linked with Wesley's views on "prevenient" or "preventing grace." Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 73-82; Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 260-270.

⁹⁹ John Wesley, *On Visiting the Sick* #98.

As Andrew C. Thompson argues, “The best way to conceive of the means of grace in Wesley’s theology is as the ‘sacramental grammar’ of his thought, grounded in the Wesleyan idea of social holiness, which names both the communal arena in which the means of grace are practiced and the salvific reality experienced by those joined together in such practice.”¹⁰⁰

One place where Wesley addresses particularly significant practices is in his “Means of Grace” sermon. There, Wesley carefully and extensively discusses what he refers to as the practices “ordained of God, as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men.”¹⁰¹ Or, in lay terms, “an outward sign of an inward grace.”¹⁰² In this context he refers specifically to *prayer* (both individual and corporate), *the searching of the Scriptures* (which includes reading, hearing, and meditating), and *the taking of the Lord’s Supper*.¹⁰³ In all of this, it remains clear that Wesley’s perspective is that the means of grace are, in Andrew Thompson’s words, “necessarily *grounded* in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, *guided* by the power of the Holy Spirit, and *directed* toward the salvation of the Christian believer.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Carl Thompson, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace: Historical and Theological Context” (D.Th diss., Divinity School of Duke University, 2012), iv.

¹⁰¹ Wesley, *Means of Grace*. II.1.

¹⁰² See notes 56 and 57 on page 25.

¹⁰³ Ibid. Please note: I have taken some freedom here to modify and update the language used; for instance when Wesley refers to “prayer” he writes in parenthesis (whether in secret or in the great congregation), I have written (both individual and corporate) so that modern readers might more easily connect to and understand the implications of Wesley’s perspective for their immediate contexts.

¹⁰⁴ Thompson, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace,” 126.

It is apparent that Wesley highly esteemed the means of grace practices, and believed they can be momentous in any believers' grace-infused life with Christ. We are therefore invited to recapture these practices which bid us to encounter God's purifying, redeeming, and sanctifying grace in our daily and corporate lives. Otherwise, as Ole Borgen notes:

Wesley's rich and balanced views on the relative worth and position of the various means of grace are reduced, and the balance destroyed. The ensuing result can only be regretted: the theologically impoverished heirs of Wesley, without realizing the consequences, open up the road to a future revivalism in danger of shallowness; to conceptions of holiness that have lost the Wesleyan anchorage in the eternal wonder of Christ's atonement; and to a pragmatic activism where the motivating force is materialistic and subjectivistic rather than flowing from lives filled with the love of God, and, as a consequence, of all men.¹⁰⁵

Theology of the Means

For Wesley, the means of grace are a marriage of God's work and our participation. Thompson points out, "The means of grace are God's work precisely because they are channels of grace rather than human works arising out of human effort and for the purpose of human merit. Wesley sees them as forms of participation in God's work of salvation, a kind of human co-operation but fundamentally enabled by the empowerment of grace."¹⁰⁶ Yet, H. Henry Knight states, "It is God's grace which enables and invites our participation in [the means of grace]... through which persons experience and respond to the loving presence of God."¹⁰⁷ And, in his introduction to the book

¹⁰⁵ Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments*, 16.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, "John Wesley and the Means of Grace," 136.

¹⁰⁷ Knight, *The presence of God in the Christian Life*, Loc. 191.

Responsible Grace, Maddox explains: “Without God’s grace, we *cannot* be saved; while without our (grace-empowered, but uncoerced) participation, God’s grace *will not* save.”¹⁰⁸

In his “Means of Grace” sermon, John Wesley spent much time specifically engaging the theological underpinnings of the means of grace, but less time expounding on the practices themselves.¹⁰⁹ This should by no means lead the reader to assume that Wesley was unconcerned with the practical application and engagement of the means of grace, or of any spiritual exercise that draws a sincere follower into a deeper, more honest love of God and neighbor. In fact, some have argued Wesley was much more of a practical (or, pastoral) theologian than any “dogmatician,” which would imply that personal and corporate application of his theological positions was of his utmost concern.¹¹⁰ And yet, Wesley spent much effort and care unpacking the theological implications of the means of grace throughout his writings. As students of Wesley, this should indicate to us how very considerable Wesley understood the means of grace to be.

At the beginning of his sermon, Wesley introduced the means of grace: “In process of time, when ‘the love of many waxed cold,’ some began to mistake the means for the end, and to place religion rather in doing those outward works, than in a heart

¹⁰⁸ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 19.

¹⁰⁹ To be fair, section V of the “means of grace” sermon begins with these words from John Wesley, “. . .how those means should be used, both as to the order and the manner of using them,” (Wesley, *Means of Grace*, V.1), however, the broad scope of the sermon in general is dealing with theology of “the means,” and not as much with the “ins and outs” of how to engage these means. Never, in the whole of the sermon, is any particular “means of grace” unpacked, described with great specific detail, or is a particular mode of engaging those “means” expounded upon.

¹¹⁰ Noble, *Holy Trinity: Holy People*, 3-5; John W. Wright, “Wesley’s Theology as Methodist Practice: Toward the Post-Modern Retrieval of the Wesleyan Tradition,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 7.

renewed after the image of God.”¹¹¹ He warns in the very next paragraph that some had used the means not for their intended purpose, but rather in such a manner that the means became “an occasion of falling,” implying that their use of “the means”—perhaps their heart’s motive?—was antithetical to the heart of God so that engaging the means of grace actually became counterintuitive and led some to the destruction of their faith.¹¹²

In Section II of the sermon, Wesley begins to clarify a critical distinction, that “the whole value of the means depends on their actual subservience to the end of religion... [and] when separate from the end, are less than nothing and vanity; that if they do not actually conduce to the knowledge and love of God, they are not acceptable in his sight.”¹¹³ Here, as in other places, Wesley is being clear that no action or means itself has any intrinsic value, but only that which leads a sincere follower of Christ towards the purpose, which is love of God and neighbor. He writes, “All outward means whatever, if separate from the Spirit of God, cannot profit at all, cannot conduce, in any degree, either to the knowledge or love of God.”¹¹⁴ And, what quickly follows is Wesley’s strong warning that the means of grace can never atone for sin, and can even lead to a form of godliness without power.¹¹⁵ For Wesley, the means are worthless in and of themselves. They are only valuable insofar as they allow God’s grace to work in the heart, mind, and life of a true follower of Jesus.

¹¹¹ Wesley, *Means of Grace*. I.2.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, I.3.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, II.2.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II.3.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, II.4, II.5.

Wesley is quite emphatic on this point; it can be safely assumed a faithfully Wesleyan understanding of the means of grace would limit the scope of those “means” to the power and presence of God at work in the life of a true seeker of Christ engaging those means. In other words, as Wesleyan scholar Diane Leclerc stresses, while “the means of grace can be closely associated with spiritual disciplines or practices that are central to the process of spiritual formation,” yet it “is not the practices themselves that change us, but the Holy Spirit who uses these practices to transform us.”¹¹⁶ Later she reaffirms, “Overall, the means of grace are really God’s gifts to us. They are the ways we connect with God and participate in our relationship with him. As we open ourselves to God, God pours his own life and the grace we need into our hearts. When that happens, we will change; we will be spiritually formed and transformed.”¹¹⁷

Other Wesleyan scholars have noted this distinction as well. Rob L. Staples writes,

Wesley was careful to make clear that the means of grace are not meritorious. They have no intrinsic power by virtue of their simply being performed. They have value to us only when we see that our salvation, from its inception to its consummation, is the work of God alone. That is the meaning of grace—God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Nevertheless, there are divinely ordained means by which this unmerited grace may come to us, and the sacraments are among the most important of these means.¹¹⁸

Methodist theologian, Henry H. Knight III, rightly points out that an authentically Wesleyan understanding should never divorce action from motive: “Wesley’s concern is

¹¹⁶ Leclerc, *Finding the Means to the End*, 75.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85. Here, Leclerc’s point is that it is God’s work, though we are partners in that effort. However, in this quote Leclerc eludes to the connection between Wesley’s means and spiritual disciplines, which deserves attention. See footnote #7 on page 7.

¹¹⁸ Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*, 100.

to prohibit pious activities from becoming means of avoiding love when they should be means through which God enables and evokes love.”¹¹⁹ Knight also notes,

To Wesley, the sharp distinction between Christ and the means of grace was “mere playing upon words,” for Christ is a means of grace in a different way from prayer or the Eucharist. The means of grace are channels “through which the grace of God is conveyed,” while Christ is “the sole price and purchaser of it.” The power which works through the means of grace is the power of the Holy Spirit; the merit is that of the Son.¹²⁰

Therefore, according to Knight, one must distinguish between Christ himself who is the “sole price and purchaser of it,” and the ways his followers engage and receive his entrusted grace.¹²¹ To obscure or confuse the boundary between who Christ is and what he does, as it relates to our participation in his grace, would miss Wesley’s perspective entirely.

The Means of Grace Specifically

There are, as have been noted, several “categories” of Wesley’s means of grace. A better word might be “groupings” or “headings,” though these word choices continue to imply somewhat of an “order” or “method” for the means of grace. A Wesleyan understanding of the means would be less of a classification and more of a symbiotically nurturing participation. While these means certainly have various distinctions depending upon how implicitly they are described and established in Scripture, these are not intended to be a structure or order of worship, nor are they systematic in nature.

¹¹⁹ Knight, *The Presence of God*, Loc. 219.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, Loc. 852.

¹²¹ This particular wording is found in Wesley, *The Means of Grace*, IV. 3.

Neither are the means of grace intended to be a complete list of comprehensive tasks. As Leclerc emphasizes, “Wesley didn’t confine God’s grace to just these practices. Because he understood grace to be God’s loving, uncreated presence, he believed many other activities could be means of grace. Thus, grace is still active even among those who have no access to specific means like Christian baptism, the Eucharist, or the study of Scripture.”¹²² Rather, these are understood to be various means by which God’s grace is encountered, bestowed, and nurtured, and whereby the believer is encouraged, convicted, convinced, challenged, and where he or she participates with God’s work both personally and corporately. As Randy Maddox notes, “Wesley understood the means of grace to be practices through which God’s pardoning and empowering Presence is truly communicated to us for the healing of our sin-diseased nature, as well as exercises that co-operantly nurture this healing.”¹²³

For the purpose of this paper, however, some sort of arrangement must be installed. The headings that follow are therefore, “instituted,” “prudential,” and “general” means of grace.¹²⁴

Instituted Means of Grace (Acts of Piety)

The instituted means of grace, according to John Wesley, are specifically those means Jesus himself ordained Christ-followers in Scripture. Rob Staples observes that

¹²² Leclerc, *Finding the Means to the End*, 75.

¹²³ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 201-202.

¹²⁴ As has been shown, these labels are distinctly Wesleyan. Though, not all Wesleyan scholars feel it appropriate or fair to replace “instituted” with “acts of piety” and “prudential” means with “acts of mercy.” See note 83 on page 31.

Wesley “distinguishes between the ‘instituted’ means of grace and the ‘prudential’ means. The former are those specifically grounded in Christ’s instructions, and include prayer, searching the Scriptures, the Lord’s Supper, fasting, and Christian fellowship.”¹²⁵ Apparently, these means were distinguishable from other “means of grace” because Christ specifically engaged them himself, and are activities Jesus specifically asked of his followers. As Wesley notes, these practices are, “ordained of God, as the ordinary channels of conveying God’s grace to the souls of men.”¹²⁶

Prayer

For Wesley, prayer was a vital practice for every believer. He proclaimed, “All who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of prayer.”¹²⁷ There are several reasons why prayer is, for Wesley, a clearly instituted means of grace. The following particular thoughts are all limited to Wesley’s means of grace sermon, though Wesley also engaged this topic in other broader contexts.

Wesley first suggests the magnitude of prayer because Jesus himself taught us to pray and to ask (Wesley notes Matthew 7:7-8 specifically).¹²⁸ Secondly, Jesus told us to

¹²⁵ “...whereas the Lord’s Supper is mentioned in Wesley’s list of instituted means, baptism is not. This is to be explained by the initiatory character of baptism – its function as a singular event at the beginning of the Christian life, not to be repeated. Wesley’s enumeration of means of grace, on the other hand, consists of those things that promote the subsequent ongoing development of the holy life.” Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*, 98.

¹²⁶ Wesley, *Means of Grace*. II.1.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, III.1.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

ask and promised it would be effectual (Matthew 7:9-11; Luke 11:13).¹²⁹ Wesley further articulates this second point by noting that Jesus also told us to “ask and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 11:5, 7-9).¹³⁰ Thirdly, Wesley points to the story of the widow who changes the judge’s mind and notes that God shall “avenge his own elect” if they “pray and faint not” (Luke 18:1-5).¹³¹ Then, Wesley draws special attention to Matthew 6:6 as an invitation from Christ to “wait for the blessings of God in private prayer, together with a positive promise, that, by this means, we shall obtain the request of our lips.”¹³² Finally, Wesley points to the Apostle James who writes that if we lack wisdom we should ask of God in prayer, and that it would be given unto us (James 4:2 and 1:5).¹³³

These thoughts offer a comprehensive overview of prayer both for the believer and those yet still to believe.¹³⁴ Wesley articulates a belief that prayer is not only commanded for us in Scripture (thus, we ought to comply), but that prayer is also a strong invitation to encounter God’s grace in unique ways. According to Knight, “For Wesley,

¹²⁹ Ibid., III.2.

¹³⁰ Ibid., III.3.

¹³¹ Ibid., III.4.

¹³² Ibid., III.5.

¹³³ Ibid., III.6.

¹³⁴ In answering an objection to whether prayer would be advantageous for the non-believer, Wesley wrote, “If it be objected, ‘But this is no direction to unbelievers; to them who know not the pardoning grace of God: For the Apostle adds, ‘But let him ask in faith;’ otherwise, ‘let him not think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord:’ I answer, The meaning of the word faith, in this place, is fixed by the Apostle himself, as if it were on purpose to obviate this objection, in the following: ‘Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering’... Not doubting but God heareth his prayer, and will fulfil the desire of his heart. The gross, blasphemous absurdity of supposing faith, in this place, to be taken in the full Christian meaning, appears hence: It is supposing the Holy Ghost to direct a man who knows he has not faith, (which is here termed wisdom,) to ask it of God, with a positive promise that ‘it shall be given him;’ and then immediately to subjoin, that it shall not be given him, unless he have it before he asks for it! But who can bear such a supposition from this scripture, therefore, as well as those cited above, we must infer, that all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of prayer.” Wesley, *Means of Grace*. III.6.

prayer is a way of life.”¹³⁵ Knight also notes that a faithful Wesleyan understanding of prayer would be that prayer is “communion with God,” that it is “absolutely necessary if we would receive any gift from God,” and that “the act of praying itself gives shape to the relationship and the Christian life [in Christ].”¹³⁶ Wesley is also explicit in encouraging both personal (private) and corporate (public) praying.¹³⁷

Searching the Scriptures

Wesley then moves on: “Second. All who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in searching the Scriptures.”¹³⁸ Wesley considered searching the Scriptures to be a means “whereby God not only gives, but also confirms and increases, true wisdom.”¹³⁹ In articulating his assertion that “searching the Scriptures” is an instituted means of grace, Wesley cites John 5:39; Acts 17:11-12; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; and 2 Peter 1:19.¹⁴⁰ Wesley is also clear that searching the Scriptures “implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon.”¹⁴¹

In considering what Wesley meant by “searching the Scriptures,” Diane Leclerc offers, “The word ‘searching’ implies a meditative reading where the Holy Spirit inspires our hearts. This is different from the study of Scripture for the purpose of doctrinal truth,

¹³⁵ Knight, *The Presence of God*, Loc. 2154.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, Loc. 2171-2178.

¹³⁷ Wesley, *Means of Grace*. II.1.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, III.7.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, III.8.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, III.7, III.8, and III.10 respectively.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II.1 and III.7.

although such study is important. If prayer is our breath, Scripture is our food.”¹⁴² Diane Leclerc is implying that Wesley meant *more* in searching the Scriptures than rote memorization, or for doctrinal orthodoxy (right belief) *only*. Wesley asserts,

But we allow, that the whole value of the means depends on their actual subservience to the end of religion; that, consequently, all these means, when separate from the end, are less than nothing and vanity; that if they do not actually conduce to the knowledge and love of God, they are not acceptable in his sight; yea, rather, they are an abomination before him, a stink in his nostrils; he is weary to bear them. Above all, if they are used as a kind of commutation for the religion they were designed to subserve, it is not easy to find words for the enormous folly and wickedness of thus turning God's arms against himself; of keeping Christianity out of the heart by those very means which were ordained for the bringing it in.¹⁴³

In other words, Wesley strongly claims that where any means is employed, it exists *only* for the purpose of encountering God’s grace, which should lead to authentic transformation. This is most certainly true of our intent to search the scriptures humbly.

The Lord’s Supper (Eucharist)

Of all the means of grace practices, Wesley viewed taking the Eucharist as being particularly meaningful for our formation. Kenneth Collins points out that Wesley affirms a “Real Presence” in the context of the Lord’s Supper (much like the early church fathers), yet “he rejected the view of a localization of that presence in the elements of bread and wine.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, Wesley rejected a transubstantiation understanding of communion, but, unlike consubstantiation, Wesley continuously held to a “Real

¹⁴² Leclerc, “Finding the Means to the End,” 83.

¹⁴³ Wesley, *Means of Grace*, II.2.

¹⁴⁴ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 262.

Presence” understanding in the elements. As Knight notes, “Wesley consistently rejects any interpretation of the Lord’s Supper as merely symbolic or as ‘real absence’.”¹⁴⁵ And H. Ray Dunning (leaning on a passage from Daniel Brevint) notes, “The Lord’s Supper was chiefly ordained for a Sacrament: 1. To represent the Sufferings of Christ, which are past, whereof it is a Memorial; 2. To convey the first Fruits of these Sufferings, in Present Graces, whereof it is a Means; and 3. To assure us of Glory to come, whereof it is an infallible Pledge.”¹⁴⁶

In fact, Wesley held such a high view of the Eucharist, it is included as the third instituted means of grace in Wesley’s “Means of Grace” sermon. Wesley writes, “All who desire an increase of the grace of God are to wait for it in partaking of the Lord’s Supper: For this also is a direction himself hath given.”¹⁴⁷ Wesley goes on to say,

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.¹⁴⁸

Wesley emphasizes that true seekers of Christ should take communion regularly. In his sermon entitled, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” Wesley writes that “it is the

¹⁴⁵ Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, Loc. 2428.

¹⁴⁶ Dunning, *Grace, Faith & Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 557; Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments*.

¹⁴⁷ Wesley, *Means of Grace*. III.11. Here, Wesley references 1 Corinthians 10:16, 11:23, and 11:28.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, III.12.

duty of every Christian to receive the Lord's Supper as often as he [she] can.”¹⁴⁹ It is clear that for Wesley taking the Lord’s Supper is not optional. Here, Wesley even argues against the notion that one can take the Lord’s Supper too often. It is through this means we receive “the forgiveness of our past sins and the present strengthening and refreshing of our souls.”¹⁵⁰ Wesley went so far as to write:

This is the food of our souls: This gives strength to perform our duty, and leads us on to perfection. If, therefore, we have any regard for the plain command of Christ, if we desire the pardon of our sins, if we wish for strength to believe, to love and obey God, then we should neglect no opportunity of receiving the Lord's Supper; then we must never turn our backs on the feast which our Lord has prepared for us. *We must neglect no occasion which the good providence of God affords us for this purpose. This is the true rule: So often are we to receive as God gives us opportunity.* Whoever, therefore, does not receive, but goes from the holy table, when all things are prepared, either does not understand his duty, or does not care for the dying command of his Saviour, the forgiveness of his sins, the strengthening of his soul, and the refreshing it with the hope of glory.¹⁵¹

Diane Leclerc notes, “The Eucharist, in Wesley’s eyes is a means by which the soul is ‘peculiarly nourished’ . . . the act, which involves memory as well as the direct activity of the Holy Spirit, is an immediate way (as in immediacy) of participating in the ongoing transforming grace of God.”¹⁵² Thus, for Wesleyans, it can be logically inferred that regularly engaging the Lord’s Supper is a crucial choice if we are to stay connected to the ongoing grace of God at work in our lives.

¹⁴⁹ Wesley, *The Duty of Constant Communion*, I.1, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-101-the-duty-of-constant-communion>.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, I.2.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I.3. Emphasis mine.

¹⁵² Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 270.

Additional Instituted Means of Grace

John Wesley developed his understanding of the means of grace over the course of his lifetime. Many scholars have written extensively on his theological development of the means of grace. The critical component to understanding the various groupings of activities is that Wesley included only those things specifically in Scripture under any heading of “instituted” means of grace. The previously listed activities are broadly understood amongst Wesleyan scholars to be “Instituted Means of Grace.” Yet, there are other activities clearly instituted in Scripture, which Wesley engages beyond that short list. The following activities are unique to Wesley’s category of Instituted Means of Grace, either by nature of their distinct activity, or because they are understood as “instituted” in places other than in Wesley’s sermon on the means of grace.

First, baptism. This practice is unique for it is understood in Wesley’s perspective to be a one-time event. In fact, some Wesleyan scholars neglect to include baptism in any list of Wesley’s means of grace for this very reason. However, baptism is most certainly a scriptural mandate for Christians.¹⁵³ In his *Treatise on Baptism*, John Wesley writes:

It is the initiatory sacrament, which enters us into covenant with God. It [baptism] was instituted by Christ, who alone has power to institute a proper sacrament, a sign, seal, pledge, and means of grace, perpetually obligatory on all Christians. We know not, indeed, the exact time of its institution; but we know it was long before our Lord’s ascension. And it was instituted in the room of circumcision. For, as that was a sign and seal of God’s covenant, so is this.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Consider that Jesus himself was baptized (Matthew 3:13-17) and Jesus asked his followers to do the same (Matthew 28:19-20), and the epistles discuss baptism thoroughly (Romans 6:3-6, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Galatians 3:27, and 1 Peter 3:21).

¹⁵⁴ John Wesley, *A Treatise on Baptism*, 225, accessed January 9, 2015, https://truth4freedom.files.wordpress.com/2012/11/wes_ww10.pdf

Andrew Thompson points out, that “while Wesley affirms baptism as a means of grace (even going so far in the *Treatise on Baptism* to affirm a doctrine of baptismal regeneration), it remains a marginal item in his consideration of the means of grace as a whole.”¹⁵⁵ And, as Maddox highlights, Wesley’s understanding of baptism has been debated amongst Wesley scholars.¹⁵⁶ Maddox suggests that “even though Wesley never included baptism on any of his lists, he surely considered it to be a means of grace. The reason for its omission was that it is not a *repeated* means for the *progressive* nurturing of holiness, as were the other means on the lists. Rather, baptism marked the initiation of the life of holiness.”¹⁵⁷

Second, fasting. The exercise of fasting is also a mandated practice for Christians throughout the New Testament, though it is inconsistently noted as an Instituted Means of Grace for Wesleyan scholars.¹⁵⁸ Diane Leclerc points out that Wesley practiced fasting from food at least weekly, noting that the benefits for Wesley were distinctive. “Besides the spiritual benefit of drawing closer to God, some have seen this as perhaps contributing to his unusually long life.”¹⁵⁹ We can see evidence of Wesley’s frequent fasting in his *Large Minutes*, where he asks many questions of true seekers, including, “How do you fast every Friday?”¹⁶⁰ Knight points out that Wesley mentions various

¹⁵⁵ Thompson “John Wesley and the Means of Grace,” 143.

¹⁵⁶ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 221.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁵⁸ Consider Matthew 6:16, “and when,” not “if” you fast.

¹⁵⁹ Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 268.

¹⁶⁰ John R. Tyson, ed., *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Anthology*, (New York:

kinds of fasting (abstaining from some, or all, food) and for various lengths (any number of days, a single day, or a half-day). In other words, for Wesley, the act of fasting was a powerful invitation—the specifics of which could be left up to the individual believer. “The degree of fasting depended on circumstance and was prudential, but fasting itself was an instituted means of grace for all times and circumstances.”¹⁶¹

Lastly, “Christian Conference,” or Christian fellowship. Thompson notes that Wesley inherited this category from John Norris (1657-1711), who wrote *A Treatise Concerning Christian Prudence*, which was formative for Wesley and his development of any means of grace theology.¹⁶² Most Wesleyan scholars agree that Christian Conference should be included in any list of Wesley’s Instituted Means of Grace conversation. Leclerc suggests that by “Christian Conference,” Wesley meant “Christian conversation,” whereby Christians are “intentional, purposeful, and diligent” in engaging conversation about our spirituality, our lives in Christ, and spurring one another on in love.¹⁶³ Maddox goes a bit further in his explanation and describes a variety of ways this was accomplished for Wesley—primarily class meetings, bands, penitent bands, and select societies—for the purpose of supporting “members’ *responsible* participation in the transforming work of God’s *grace*.”¹⁶⁴ Knight takes it further still and lists several

Oxford University Press, 1999), 326.

¹⁶¹ Knight, *The Presence of God*, Loc. 2229.

¹⁶² Thompson, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace,” 145. Thompson is quite helpful at explaining the history of Wesley’s encounter with this writing as well as the writing of many other authors who helped shaped Wesley’s theology. His second and third chapters are especially keen and offer deep insight into the resources Wesley used to shape his thinking.

¹⁶³ Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 269.

¹⁶⁴ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 212.

features of Wesley's early societies which shed light on his perspective: they were seen as a haven of sorts from an evil world, the groups watched over one another in love, they were mutually responsible for one another, and each looked to Wesley as their spiritual director.¹⁶⁵

For Wesley, Christian Conferencing became quite prioritized as he, apparently, drew much inspiration from the 1st Century Church, where “all the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals and to prayer.”¹⁶⁶ As Wesley and his early followers sought to figure out what was meant by “the working out of faith in fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12), they evidently drew from the Early Church’s stories of believers drawing strength and substance from both their relationship to one another and in the Lord. Therefore, for Wesley, Christian Conferencing refers to much more than the attending of a weekly church service, or being a member of a local congregation. It was a substantial, committed, formative rhythm of life whereby Christians could encounter and be shaped by grace, in unique and dynamic ways, through direct, authentic, and intimate relationship to and with other believers.

To summarize, in his sermon *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, Wesley presents a list which, though not intended to be comprehensive, can be understood to include those practices he prioritized “all works of piety; such as public prayer, family prayer, and praying in our closet; receiving the Supper of the Lord; searching the Scriptures, by

¹⁶⁵ Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, Loc. 1807-1829.

¹⁶⁶ Acts 2:42, (NLT).

hearing, reading, meditating; and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows.”¹⁶⁷

Prudential Means of Grace (Acts of Mercy)

Kenneth Collins observes: “Beyond the instituted means of grace, Wesley affirmed the value of prudential means, that is, particular rules posited by reason and experience in light of the guidance of the Holy Spirit with the goal of growing in grace.”¹⁶⁸ This sentiment is seemingly aligned with Wesley’s heart for practices beyond the scope of the instituted means of grace discussed above. Sometimes known as “acts or works of mercy,” these means of grace are equally “genuine,” whereby “not only are the poor helped to a better life, but also those who minister to them benefit in so many ways.”¹⁶⁹ As Knight describes, this distinction is “based on the object of the human activity in the means of grace...works of mercy occur when ‘we are called to relieve the distress of our neighbor, whether in body or soul,’...yet works of mercy are more than *means* of grace; they are acts of love which is the *end* of religion.”¹⁷⁰ Many scholars note that it is precisely for this reason Wesley values these prudential means of grace quite highly. Maddox states:

Wesley was aware that such actions [contributions to the welfare of others – from clothing and shelter, to healthcare and education, to basic friendship] were not

¹⁶⁷ John Wesley, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* #43, III.5, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-43-the-scripture-way-of-salvation/>

¹⁶⁸ Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 266.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁷⁰ Knight, *The Presence of God*, Loc. 212.

typically identified as means of grace. In his mature opinion, they not only qualified as such, they could be valued as highly as any of the other means. Behind this high valuation lies his conviction of the connection between love of God and neighbor.¹⁷¹

Yet, it should be noted that while some Wesleyan scholars intertwine the concepts of “prudential means of grace” and “acts of mercy,” not all scholars agree. Thompson is particularly helpful at this point:

The other moniker Wesley uses for the prudential means of grace is ‘works of mercy.’ The two terms largely overlap, though not exactly. When Wesley uses the term ‘works of mercy,’ he has in mind the example Jesus lays out in Matthew 25:31-46. The prudential means of grace as works of mercy are, in one sense, those activities by which we love our neighbor – feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting those who are sick and in prison.”¹⁷²

Thompson goes on to claim,

The works of mercy are similar to the prudential means of grace more generally in the sense that the *substance* of such practices is, in fact, instituted by God (i.e. activities of engaged discipleship) while the *form* is dependent on time period and circumstance. That is the primary way that we can account for the fact that activities as diverse as class meetings and prison visitation all fit under the category of the prudential means. That is the *practical expression* that such means will find may vary while the *root calling* and *purpose* for these remains constant.¹⁷³

Keep in mind that Wesley never synthesized a comprehensive means of grace catalogue. Wesley himself uses various phrasing throughout his writings. Technically speaking, it could be argued, a faithful understanding of John Wesley would not view the phrasing “prudential means of grace” and “works of mercy” as being essentially synonymous. However, they are compatible insofar as both phrases are Wesley’s

¹⁷¹ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 215.

¹⁷² Thompson, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace,” 150.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

specifically, and are used to refer to practices of graced-infused service in the life of the believer. Wesley used them somewhat interchangeably. For the purpose of this paper, these categories have been united together, primarily for readability. Many Wesleyan scholars use the phrasing interchangeably. The three most commonly referenced “Wesleyan” prudential acts of grace are: feeding the poor, visiting those imprisoned, and doing all the good you can. Though, Wesley himself listed a more extensive list:

...all works of mercy; whether they relate to the bodies or souls of men; such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted; such as the endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feeble-minded, to succour the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death.”¹⁷⁴

It might be assumed by some that Wesley would have placed a much higher value on the personal, or inward work of the Spirit. However, as Collins points out, “Wesley draws a correlation between works of piety and works of mercy and sees the former as related to the law of God and the latter to the love of neighbor.”¹⁷⁵ Collins goes on to quote Wesley from his sermon *The Important Question*:

It must also be allowed, that as the love of God naturally leads to works of piety, so the love of our neighbour naturally leads all that feel it to works of mercy. It inclines us to feed the hungry; to clothe the naked; to visit them that are sick or in prison; to be as eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; a husband to the widow, a father to the fatherless. But can you suppose, that the doing this will prevent or lessen your happiness yea, though you did so much, as to be like a guardian angel

¹⁷⁴ John Wesley, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* #43, III.5, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-43-the-scripture-way-of-salvation/>. John Wesley, *On Zeal* #92. II.5, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-92-on-zeal>.

¹⁷⁵ Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 163.

to all that are round about you? On the contrary, it is an infallible truth, that all worldly joys are less than that one joy of doing kindnesses.¹⁷⁶

The prudential means of grace are things Christians do to be present in the lives of others: to give, to love, to serve, and to minister. And as Wesley claimed, “All worldly joys are less than that one joy of doing kindness.”¹⁷⁷ In the end, that is the invitation of the prudential means; to find grace in the act of giving and hope amidst the brokenhearted.

General Means of Grace

Lastly, we must briefly consider the general means of grace, which are more theologically elusive, though still rooted in Scripture and established from a sincere relationship with Jesus the Christ. Consider the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23, NLT). These general means of grace are, according to Knight, “graced responses to grace received.”¹⁷⁸ Or, as Thompson notes, “General means [are] broad approaches to the practice of faith that require an intentional awareness of one’s motivations in thought, word, and action.”¹⁷⁹

Leclerc emphasizes, “The general means of grace include universal obedience and keeping the commandments, watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and

¹⁷⁶ John Wesley, *The Important Question* #84, III.5, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-84-the-important-question/>.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Knight, *Practicing the Presence of God in the Christian Life*, Loc. 2305.

¹⁷⁹ Thompson, *General Means of Grace*, 250.

exercising the presence of God.”¹⁸⁰ And, again, Thompson notes the general means of grace “are less a category alongside the instituted and prudential means of grace and more an underlying one that must needs be a part of the holistic Christian life in order for that life to be one in which God’s grace is truly efficacious for salvation.”¹⁸¹

The general means are therefore not a list of activities or actions, but are postures of the heart, those things which align us with the heartbeat of our Savior. It has been claimed that the general means, unlike the instituted or prudential, are actually the only cluster of Wesley’s means which cannot be falsified. In other words:

The instituted and prudential means of grace are discrete practices that are possible to be performed by ‘going through the motions’ or even with an intentional hardness of heart. Such is not the case with the general means of grace, which by their nature call for a searching self-examination and daily reflection on one’s attitudes and motivations. They are, in this sense, forms of inward spiritual discipline that produce a disposition causing one to be constantly attentive to God and the things of God.¹⁸²

To that extent, the general means of grace are significant patterns of sanctified Christian spirituality, and should be a priority throughout ones pursuit of holiness.

Practically Wesleyan: The Means and the Nazarenes

In his discussion on the Wesleyan revival, Paul Chilcote said, “If we take for granted that the church is always in need of reform, we may be surprised to find that renewal often seems, or is perceived, to be radical. ‘Radical’ literally means to go the root

¹⁸⁰ Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 265.

¹⁸¹ Thompson, “John Wesley and the Means of Grace,” 153.

¹⁸² Thompson, *General Means of Grace*, 252.

of something.”¹⁸³ Therefore, the question must be asked, what is the root of Wesleyan spirituality? It is our claim that Wesley’s means are foundational to his ideology, and they are inextricably linked with his holiness theology. If that is the case, then those who call themselves Wesleyan, especially Nazarenes, would benefit from revisiting Wesley’s means as an applicable spiritual formation approach.

Wesley’s means offer a significant pattern for Christians who desire to pursue holiness. In his book, *John Wesley’s Teachings Volume 2*, Thomas Oden suggests that “to stand ‘in Wesley’s connection’ traditionally has meant that one looks to him for spiritual formation.” He goes on to point out that much of what Wesley offers is a “pastoral guide” and that Wesley continues to offer wisdom by which people can, and should, be formed today. Oden observes how “remarkable [it is] that persons thoroughly immersed in modern consciousness still seek to reappropriate Wesley’s counsel” and that “untold numbers of people over the globe have been personally formed by his spirit, even when unaware of it.”¹⁸⁴ This perspective is a helpful one; our rhythms of life and pursuit of faith can be dynamically shaped with the wisdom of Wesley. They are movements in grace, toward grace, and because of grace whereby the Church is shaped by grace. Wesley was abundantly clear: this grace is a gift of God. We are but partakers:

The grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is *free in all*, and *free for all*. First. It is free in all to whom it is given. It does not depend on any power or merit in man; no, not in any degree, neither in whole, nor in part. It does not in anywise depend either on the good works or righteousness of the receiver; not on anything he has done, or anything he is. It does not depend on his endeavors. It does not depend on his good tempers, or good desires, or good purposes and

¹⁸³ Paul W. Chilcote, ed., *The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 28.

¹⁸⁴ Oden, *John Wesley’s Teachings Volume 2*, Loc. 460-472.

intentions; for all these flow from the free grace of God; they are the streams only, not the fountain. They are the fruits of free grace, and not the root. They are not the cause, but the effects of it. Whatsoever good is in man, or is done by man, God is the author and doer of it. Thus is his grace free in all; that is, no way depending on any power or merit in man, but on God alone, who freely gave us his own Son, and "with him freely giveth us all things. But it is free for *all*, as well as *in all*.¹⁸⁵

It is free. It is readily available. The choice becomes ours: to open ourselves up to this grace, to prioritize his grace at work, and to participate with God in what he is doing and what he wants to do in and through us. Or, we may choose the opposite, to extricate ourselves from his mission and kingdom here on this earth. To be sure, Wesley's means of grace is not a list of behaviors one must accomplish, nor is it the only appropriate spiritual formation approach. Rather, the means of Wesley are ways in which we open ourselves to grace, we are shaped by grace, grace flows through us to others, and grace prevents, justifies, sustains, redeems, and sanctifies our lives in Christ. Wesley's means of grace are but one spiritual formation ideology, but they are a holistic and substantial paradigm. And, for people who call themselves Wesleyan, they are a significant responsibility.

For the Church of the Nazarene, then, it follows that attending to the means might be a necessary corrective. In a day where "love of many waxed cold," as Wesley states in the introduction to his means of grace sermon, it is a significant choice for Nazarenes today; to pursue holiness of heart and life with humility, allowing grace to shape our deepest selves, or to follow the patterns of man towards the appearance of holiness without the foundational transforming work of grace in our lives. Engaging Wesley's

¹⁸⁵ John Wesley, *Free Grace #128*, accessed January 9, 2015, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-128-free-grace/>

means of grace can be a significantly formative endeavor. Through these means we can be rooted and established in patterns of participating with God’s grace at work in and through our lives, for His glory, and resulting in the transformation of our truest selves.

The Church can heed the warning of Wesley, “We must allow that the whole value of the means depends on their actual subservience to the end of religion...in a heart renewed after the image of God.”¹⁸⁶ The means are not ends of themselves, but they are opportunities to encounter and be shaped by grace. They are opportunities for continued renewal and restoration into Christlikeness. . They are not intended to be private, though they are deeply personal; they are contextually always found in relationship—with God and others.

For the Church of the Nazarene, Wesley’s means of grace offers a significant invitation. If the Church desires to pursue patterns of graced-infused holiness in the 21st century, perhaps Wesley’s means of grace are the foundational corrective. The church of the Nazarene can choose to return to the call of Wesley to pursue holiness of heart of life, through patterns of intentional participation with God’s grace, by purposefully engaging Wesley’s means of grace practices both individually and corporately. Perhaps in so doing, we can return to the heartbeat of Wesley and remember that “the end of every commandment is love, out of a pure heart, with faith unfeigned.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ This sentence combines two of Wesley’s thoughts from his Means of Grace sermon. Wesley never juxtaposed these sentiments together, though the author believes this is a faithful representation of Wesley’s perspective. John Wesley, “The Means of Grace Sermon,” accessed January 9, 2015, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-16-the-means-of-grace/>

¹⁸⁷ Wesley, *Means of Grace Sermon*.

Our call is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and our neighbor as we do ourselves...and to be “purified from pride, anger, and evil desire, by a faith of the operation of God.”¹⁸⁸ Perhaps, by mindfully attending to these spiritual formation practices of Wesley, those “outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God...the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace,” we might once again rediscover a grace-infused call to be wholly Christ’s throughout the world.¹⁸⁹ Perhaps, then, we can realize our call—to be Christian, holiness, missional—was not as much about us as it was about God’s Kingdom, and his purposes, and his grace, all along.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

If, as this project contends, John Wesley's means of grace practices are definitively formative for Christians pursuing holiness of heart and life, and if they are a valued model of spiritual formation/discipleship, then a resource describing these practices, and offering creative suggestions of engagement, is a necessary and effective tool for Christ's Church in the 21st century. Therefore, the attached artifact is a non-fiction book proposal, entitled *Formative Holiness: A Year with Wesley's Means of Grace for Sunday School or Small Group Ministry*. The book is a resource for local church ministry; as such, it (1) offers the reader insight as to the purpose and reasoning for creating such a resource, and outlines the structure of the resource for ease of use; (2) introduces John Wesley's means of grace practices, offering a brief historical background and theological implications; (3) offers the group practical ways of engaging John Wesley's means of grace practices in a small group format. The resource includes an opening/closing modified Wesleyan covenant service, and one unit of study for practical application. Should the book be published in the future, it will include a total of eight units of study for practical application and two additional modified units for Advent and Holy Week.

John Wesley's means of grace practices are not a comprehensive list of "must-do's" for all Christians, rather they are practices which hold a significant invitation to all believers. John Wesley never systemized his list of significant practices, and this resource does not attempt to do so either. Rather, the practices Wesley highly valued for growth in grace are offered in a small group format, with discussion questions and suggested

(guided) activities to engage the group in these practices. The intended goal is that small groups will rediscover the significance of doing faith together, and that the practices John Wesley highly valued will become meaningful methods of engaging faith in a small group context.

SECTION 5: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

January 1, 2016

D.C. Jacobson & Associates
submissions@dcjacobson.com

To Whom It May Concern:

Your reputation in the publishing community, and your commitment to representing new and fresh voices, enticed me to contact you for literary representation.

North Americans in the early 21st century live in a world with blurred boundaries between truth and opinion, between reality and perception, with tensions of semantics threatening to overtake conversations and relationships at every turn. Because of this, spiritual formation conversation has become somewhat muddled. This is especially true for North American Christians who identify as Wesleyan, or those who find themselves within the Wesleyan stream of spirituality.

Resources which both acknowledge our present reality, and connect 21st century Christians with historical and orthodox resources on holiness spirituality are desperately needed. Resources which gift the church with practical ways to engage holiness spirituality are likewise in great need. This book, *Formative Holiness: A Year with Wesley's Means of Grace for Sunday School or Small Group Ministry* is just such a resource. It is written as a curriculum opportunity for local church congregations whose people are interested in pursuing holiness of heart and life, a foundational Wesleyan tenet.

Having begun my career as an educator, I understand how people learn. This resource is both creative and simple so that a broad audience might find treasures within. Having earned a Master's of Divinity from Nazarene Theological Seminary, I am well-trained in our Wesleyan theological tradition. This book is faithful to Wesleyan ideology and offers a practical way to engage Wesley today. Having earned a Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation from George Fox Evangelical Seminary, I have the necessary perspective to engage a spiritual formation conversation through a Wesleyan theological lens. This book offers readers both.

I have a deep respect for your opinion, and feel your perspective will help shape this project into a foundational resource for North American, Wesleyan Christians. I deeply appreciate any help or consideration you can offer. Thank you for your time and consideration of this proposal.

With highest regards,
Dr. Aimee Stone Cooper
2121 Clark Ave
Cottage Grove, OR 97424
(562) 646-8136
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Non-Fiction Book Proposal

Working Title: *Formative Holiness: A Year with John Wesley's Means of Grace for Sunday School or Small Group Ministry*

Author: Dr. Aimee Stone Cooper
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Hook: A dynamic and fresh approach to Wesleyan Christian formation, utilizing the practices Wesley identified as means of grace, in a small group format with applicable questions, and creative activities.

Overview: John Wesley was an 18th century theologian who spent a majority of his life calling Christ's church to holiness. For Wesley, that was both a personal and pious quest, as well as a corporate and social one. Though Wesley never systemized a comprehensive list of activities for Christians to accomplish, he did famously say, "By 'means of grace' I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace." Followers of Wesley have summarized this sentiment by referring to "outward signs of inward grace." This resource has been written to encourage and challenge Christians to engage Wesley's means of grace in a new and fresh way for the 21st century.

Purpose:

- To give an overview of Wesley's means of grace
- To provide opportunities for small groups of Christians to engage Wesley's Means of Grace practices.
- To gift Christ's church with a resource to help Christians grow in grace toward holiness of heart and life.

Promotion and Marketing:

The author has served as an associate pastor throughout the Southwest Region of the Church of the Nazarene and enjoys an extensive network of relationships throughout. For the Church of the Nazarene, the author has connections with several higher education institutions which can help connect the resource to a broad audiences of churches and districts.

The author expects this resource to be promoted through social media (the author's Facebook page – with over 1,000 contacts, the author's blog website, Southwest Nazarene Women's Clergy Facebook page, and on the Church of the Nazarene's general website). Serious interest has been expressed by the official Church of the Nazarene magazine, *Holiness Today*, for the author to write several articles directly related to this academic study, and the resource would therefore be broadly advertised throughout the denomination.

Competition:

- *30 Days with Wesley: A Prayer Book*, by: Richard E. Buckner. (Beacon Hill Press, 2012).
- *Simply Rejoicing*, by: Patsy Lewis (Beacon Hill Press, 2006). Patsy Lewis has also written *Simply Praying* (Beacon Hill Press, 2009), and *Simply Rejoicing* (Beacon Hill Press, 2013).
- *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience*, by: Kevin Watson (Seedbed Publishing, 2013).
- *The Means of Grace: Traditioned Practice in Today's World*, by: Andrew C. Thompson (Seedbed Publishing, 2015).

Uniqueness: Multiple books on John Wesley's means of grace are available from a theological angle. Many books on one or two of Wesley's means of grace are available from a practical application angle. Few, if any, books currently on the market offer both an overview of Wesley's means of grace practices as well as a practical application for those means, practiced in the context of a small group.

Endorsements:

- Dr. Leonard Sweet, Wesleyan and Church historian and author
- Dr. Donna K. Wallace, bestselling author and theologian
- Dr. Ron Benefiel, Point Loma Nazarene University
- Drs. Keith and Judi Schwanz, Nazarene Theological Seminary
- Dr. Steve Weber, Heart to Heart Haiti Director
- Dr. David Graves, General Superintendent Church of the Nazarene

Book Outline:

The Introduction offers readers a chance to gain an overview of the purpose, pedagogy, structure and application of the resource. In addition, an explanation is made as to the title of the work, seeing as how some in the Wesleyan tradition might question the phrase "formative" when referencing Wesley.

Section 1 presents historical and theological background of John Wesley's work and life, and the significance of his means of grace. This section offers an overview of the practices Wesley valued, and an explanation for current application.

The first week of curriculum is a Wesleyan Covenant Service, in updated language, for the context of a committed small group of believers.

Then, the curriculum splits into eight units of study, each focusing on a different theme significant for Wesleyans:

- Unit 1: The Holy Club / Small Group Ministries
- Unit 2: Grace
- Unit 3: The Body of Christ
- Unit 4: Engaging the World

- Unit 5: Family Religion / Home Life
- Unit 6: Stewardship
- Unit 7: Social Justice
- Unit 8: Holiness of Heart and Life

Each of these units is divided further into 5 weeks of study. While each unit follows the basic outline of study, each week's lesson or activity is directly related to that unit's theme of study – with the exception of Week 4, Acts of Mercy, which allows for groups to engage Wesley's acts of mercy in whatever way works best for their content. The outline for each unit is as follows: Week 1: Prayer, Week 2: Searching the Scriptures, Week 3: Scripture Meditation, Week 4: Acts of Mercy, Week 5: Reflect and Remember. Week 6 is intended to be a break week.

Finally, two abbreviated units of study are offered for the Advent season and Holy Week.

Intended Readers:

- Pastors
- Sunday School Teachers
- Small Group Leaders
- Small Group Participants

Manuscript: The Introduction Chapter, Section 1, The Covenant Renewal Service, and UNIT 1 have all been written. The final product should approximate 70-80,000 words.

Author Bio:

Aimee Stone Cooper is an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene. She has worked as an elementary school teacher, a curriculum developer and editor for Sunday School Ministries in the Church of the Nazarene, and as a youth pastor at several Nazarene churches.

Aimee has earned a B.A. in Child Development from Point Loma Nazarene University, and a Master's of Divinity degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary. She is expected to complete a Doctorate of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation from George Fox Evangelical Seminary in April of 2016.

Aimee is married to Christopher Cooper. They live in Cottage Grove, Oregon, where they are foster parents, and are expecting their first biological child in May of 2016.

SECTION 6: POST-SCRIPT

I initially began my research on a project wrestling with the necessity for honesty and humility in authentic Christian spiritual formation. However, I quickly realized this would have led me towards fields of study (psychology and sociology) beyond my scope of expertise. In wrestling with the topic, and feeling a sense of urgency that honesty and humility are critical for and crucial to our formation in Christ, I stumbled upon a renewed interest in John Wesley's means of grace practices. I found in Wesley a clear directive to Christ's church that we must be both honest and humble, as well as an applicable resource as to how to pursue such authenticity. The topic of John Wesley's means of grace was, for me, an anchor of hope for my own spirituality.

This realization came on gradually through much internal processing. I owe a great deal of debt to many who have held conversations with me *ad nauseam*. Countless Nazarene friends, in hearing my initial and ever-evolving thoughts on Wesleyan spirituality reflected an overwhelming positive response: yes, a corrective is needed—yes, resources are needed—yes, you're on the right track! Though casual conversation can never equate to appropriate academic scholarship, those conversations became foundational for my thinking. I began to sense a theme.

In my experience, many Nazarene's tend to express a feeling or concern that something is missing in our spiritual practices. I began to wonder why we've ignored, or overlooked, John Wesley's practical engagement of spiritual formation practices in our pursuit of holiness and sanctification. One limitation of this project rests here. It is possible that the relationship between the Church of the Nazarene and the American Holiness movement might account for the denomination's departure of the practical

Wesley. More research would be beneficial on this topic. It seems clear to me: if we are to take the theological tenets of Wesley, then wisdom would require us to also honor the context within which those ideas were formed—primarily, the means of grace practices discussed in this work.

Along the way I had a formative and crucial conversation with Dr. Carla Sunberg, the president of Nazarene Theological Seminary who pointed me towards the significance of our participation in the grace of God at work in our lives. I owe her much credit and many thanks for steering my thinking toward a significant tenet of Wesleyan spirituality which I had somehow, previously overlooked. The concept of participation became a true corrective in my thinking, and a foundational lens through which I read and interpret Wesley throughout this project.

All that being said, I have to confess the irony of presenting the practical application of Wesley's means of grace practices, when so many have been elusive for me personally. To be fair, some of his named practices (prayer and Scripture reading, for instance) come naturally to me. However, with the constraints of a busy life and my personality limitations, I must confess to never having been as disciplined in the means of grace or in any spiritual practice as I would like to be, feel I should be, nor as Wesley himself would instruct me to be. For a majority of this project I have wrestled with my personal lack of engaging some of these practices Wesley so highly valued. And, for me, Wesley has proved true at this point—I get the sense there is, in fact, an ebb and flow to grace at work in our lives that is directly proportional to our participation with God in pursuing his presence in our lives. There have been seasons throughout my life of what I would call disciplined pursuit, and seasons of lazy disconnect; God's grace is always

abundant no matter our effort—yet it flows more freely and is a more felt presence the more we open ourselves up to him (ironically, only by grace). Throughout the course of my life I have not personally or corporately engaged the whole of Wesley’s means of grace practices regularly, yet through this project I have realized my need and desire to do so. This research has met a need for me personally, and has driven me toward valuing these practices with practical engagement in my own life.

This project finds itself with its own limitations of my personal time, intelligence, effort, and perspective. Further study would be helpful in the area of the means specifically as they relate to our progression in grace and holiness, and Wesley’s perspective of how acts of mercy truly form holiness within us. For this project, and specifically with the space limitations, little was addressed as to the general means of grace as well, and their significance for holiness of heart and life.¹⁹⁰ Much more can and should be written on the general means of grace as they are a somewhat ignored commodity in Wesleyan scholarship.

Finally, I personally would love to continue to engage Wesley’s means of grace in the context of relationships with others who are on the same journey. Perhaps that is why the artifact, which was originally intended to be a popular book, became instead a curriculum for small group study. We are who we are, together in Christ. And we are formed and shaped by our own journey together as much (if not more so) than we are by our personal and private faith-journeys. It is my hope this conversation on Wesley’s means of grace will be edifying to the Church at large, and that others like me—even the

¹⁹⁰ For more clarity on Wesley’s general means of grace, see the conversation beginning on page 56 of this project.

most undisciplined and careless of us—might find help and hope for their spiritual journeys in the practices Wesley highly valued as being “necessary to sanctification.”¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ John Wesley, Sermon 43, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, III.5

FORMATIVE HOLINESS: A YEAR WITH WESLEY'S MEANS OF GRACE
FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL OR SMALL GROUPS

By: Aimee Stone Cooper

May, 2016

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INTRODUCTION

‘By grace are ye saved:’ Ye are saved from your sins, from the guilt and power thereof, ye are restored to the favour and image of God, not for any works, merits, or deservings of yours, but by the free grace, the mere mercy of God, through the merits of his well-beloved Son: Ye are thus saved, not by any power, wisdom, or strength, which is in you, or in any other creature; but merely through the grace or power of the Holy Ghost, which worketh all in all... And, in fact, he hath not left us undetermined; he hath shown us the way wherein we should go. We have only to consult the oracles of God; to inquire what is written there; and, if we simply abide by their decision, there can no possible doubt remain. According to this, according to the decision of holy writ all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the means which he hath ordained; in using, not in laying them aside.

~ John Wesley, Sermon: 16—On The Means of Grace

Let me tell you a story. James and Francis are a young Nazarene couple who have been married for just over six years. They hope to start their family soon. They are both Christians, raised in the Church of the Nazarene, who are still quite active in their local Nazarene congregation. At a young age James and Francis learned to memorize scripture (through Bible Quizzing), sing songs about God (James has helped lead worship for almost 10 years), and “make good choices” (both were leaders in their youth group). James and Francis both went to Nazarene institutions for their undergraduate education, which is how they met and where they fell in love.

This young couple has a strong desire to be “Christian” today—but recently they have begun to wonder what that means, and how to live it out. Faith feels distant from their life. They want to grow deeper in their relationship with Christ. However, Sunday morning worship and various other church activities have all started to feel more like obligations than anything life-giving. Both James and Francis have begun

questioning their attendance of church on a weekly basis. They wonder whether going to church is, among other practices, “a must” for someone claiming to be a Christian.

On a deeper level, James and Francis secretly wonder if there is anything more to a sincere faith journey. Both have explored various systems of discipleship (they have been in multiple small groups, and are now leading a Young Adults Sunday School class). They feel as though they have “heard it all before,” and both are growing restless. Every sermon feels like a tired re-worked homily they have heard numerous times before. There is little wonder left in their hearts, and no life in their worship. The more they *do* for the church, the busier and more stressed they feel.

Their relationship with Christ, both as individuals and as a couple, has definitely become something other than what it once was. It now feels like work, and intimacy with Christ in prayer feels like a foreign language. Their Bible sits on their bookshelf gathering dust—“we use our iReaders” they justify—but, if they are honest, they only do so sporadically. Their pocketbook shows that they tithe regularly, but do not live generously apart from any perceived obligations. Hidden in their pantry is a small collection of wine, which they both enjoy but would never confess to having, since church leadership (officially) prohibits the consumption of alcohol. There is no place in their lives for honest, true friendships, and it feels as though there is no safe place to ask the questions burning in their hearts.

With their heads they understand the call for all Christians to “be holy,” but they are dissatisfied with the answers to their questions as to what that looks like in their everyday lives. Though the Church’s theology of holiness is something that resonates with their hearts, they admit it is only to a certain extent. They have questions

about holiness for which they have not found practical answers. James and Francis are at a crossroads. Will they continue on this path, or will they choose another way?

Will you, their church family, engage James and Francis in honest conversation? Will you provide resources to couples like James and Francis who are spiritually hungry for deeper— not more to do—and more authentic, reliable, and dependable life-infused grace resources for their journey in Christ?

Will you, their church family, create space for James and Francis to encounter honest conversation about life, and the things that matter to them? A place that is free from condemnation (Romans 8:1 reminds us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus)?

Will you, their church family, make honest spirituality a priority for your community of believers? Will you model humility as you seek God together? Will you stop telling them what to do, and instead will you start exploring faith and experiencing life together?

In other words, will you commit to journey with James and Francis, and others like them, toward depth, honesty, and humility in your faith-walk? And, are you willing to make doing so together a priority for the next year?

Purpose of this Book

North Americans in the early 21st century are living in a tumultuous era. Ours is a world with blurred boundaries between truth and opinion, between reality and perception, with tensions of semantics threatening to overtake conversations and relationships at every turn. The words “spiritual” and “spirituality” are now

commonplace terms; for the people of God, we must begin to articulate a distinctively Christian paradigm of formation if we are to stay faithful to the gospel of Jesus the Christ. This is an especially crucial tension for holiness people, like ourselves, whose hearts are impassioned for loving others and learning to live lives set apart for the glory of God.

Spiritual formation is one phrase which has become more commonplace in recent years. From a Christian perspective, spiritual formation is the process of being formed into the character and life of Christ for the sake of others. As Dee Freeborn points out in his book *The Upward Call*, this idea of formation has been around since the writing of Galatians 4. Yet, there can be confusion about the specific implications of the somewhat elusive phrase, “spiritual formation.” Several of the following books might be helpful to investigate if this is a tension familiar to you, or in your church congregation. Some of these resources are written from our Wesleyan perspective, while others offer additional points of view:

- Boa, Kenneth. *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).
- Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path of Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988).
- Freeborn, Dee. *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation and the Holy Life* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1994).
- Leclerc, Diane & Mark A. Maddix, eds. *Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2001).
- Mulholland, Robert. *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993).
- Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002).

Some Wesleyans have struggled with the phrase “spiritual formation.” This resource is intended to help aid in that conversation, in the context of Sunday School classes and small groups. The concept of being formed into the image of Christ for the sake of others is absolutely scriptural and aligns thoroughly with Wesleyan ideology. However, because of perceived abuses, ambiguity in the phrase, and perhaps differing views of holiness and sanctification, many of us have found embracing spiritual formation difficult. Perhaps a better phrase would be, “Christian formation.”

You might be surprised to find that John Wesley was deeply concerned with Christian formation.¹⁹² For Wesley, who spent the majority of his life and ministry calling Christ’s church to holiness of heart and life, he utilized the phrase *means of grace* which he found by reading others in the faith who had lived before him. You might have heard of this phrase before. Wesley wrote, “By ‘means of grace’ I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.”¹⁹³ Or, in other words, an outward sign of an inner grace.

Wesley placed a particularly high value on the grace of God. It would be fair to say that for Wesley, everything hinged on God’s grace. The *means*, then, are those practices which Christians are invited to engage, participate in, attend to, and implement,

¹⁹² You will be hard pressed to find the same language in his writings as you hear today, but the sentiments are certainly there.

¹⁹³ Wesley’s sermons and writings have been published in numerous places. One easily accessible resource is available at <http://wesley.nnu.edu>. The website boasts, “The Wesley Center Online website is a collection of historical and scholarly resources about the Wesleyan Tradition, theology, Christianity, and the Church of the Nazarene.” This particular quote of Wesley is found in his Sermon 16: *The Means of Grace*. See: <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-16-the-means-of-grace>, accessed December 16, 2015.

both personally and corporately, in order to recognize, allow, and celebrate God's presence and work in and through their lives. The *means* are historical in that they have been a part of the nature of God's people since the beginning. The *means* are relevant in that they are applicable, accessible, and advantageous for us today. The *means* are significant in that they are valuable practices which allow God's people to be shaped by grace, in grace, and through grace, for God's glory alone.

This resource is an invitation to encounter these historical, relevant, and significant practices in a new and fresh way so that Christians can learn to confront their true selves, and be met with the gift of God's sustaining, preventing, and sanctifying grace—with the hope that our lives are transformed into lives that reflect his holy glory. God's grace is abundant, and there is nothing we can do to earn it, in any way whatsoever. God's grace is also considerable and cannot be underestimated. These practices are merely invitations to open yourself up with the hope of encountering God's grace in a dynamic way.

If James and Francis, our friends from the opening story, were to encounter the means of grace through a small group context, what might happen for them? Perhaps they would find themselves enlivened, encouraged, challenged, and renewed in their faith-journey. Perhaps they would learn, in honesty and humility, to reflect on their life in Christ and assess where they are headed. Perhaps they would become impassioned to serve others and would recognize a new invitation to engage God's grace in the lives of others throughout your community.

In learning to pray together, and in being invited to experience prayer practices beyond what we are familiar and comfortable with, we can be profoundly

stretched and encounter dynamic invitations for growth. Choosing to serve together and being compelled beyond your comfort zone, with the presence of others who are doing the same, can be an amazing opportunity to encounter God's grace at work *for you* as well as for the lives of those you are serving. Exploring historical and practical tenets of faith, in a community of like-minded and committed believers, can be a challenging endeavor. There will likely be moments of difficult tension and frustration. At the same time, it can be a beautiful experience of coming together, being shaped by one another, and encountering the beautiful realities of God's kingdom in a genuine, applicable, and life-breathing way.

The means of grace practices are exactly that: means, or exercises/routines/practices where we are invited to encounter the reality of our true selves meeting the unmerited favor/love/kindness/goodness of God. The result: lives transformed—not by our own power, tenacity, willingness, or choice, but by the goodness and loving kindness of our most holy God. These are exercises, routines, or practices John Wesley highly valued, and they are inextricably linked with his theological precept of holiness. The purpose of this resource, then, is to introduce the practices John Wesley valued as means of grace, for Christians living in the 21st century. These will be helpful for any who desire to encounter traditional spiritual formation/discipleship activities in a committed, small group format.

Passion for this Project

In the story of James and Francis, we have seen a young couple who is hungry for more—certainly not more to do (they are already quite busy); rather, James

and Francis are looking for something deeper and more significant in their spirituality. What they are currently experiencing is beginning to frustrate them. They are yearning for a place to be authentic and to encounter life-infusing transformation.

Unfortunately, there are many in our churches who are like this young couple. In my personal experience, throughout over a decade in local church ministry, I have seen this story unfold time and time again. I have encountered many friends like James and Francis—their story is fiction, but it is based on real conversations I have had with others. It is also something I have personally struggled with on a real, true, deep level. It is, in part, a reflection of some of my personal story as well. Many of the programs and ministries of the church are good and well-intentioned, but they often do not breathe life into my soul.

What does it look like to follow Christ? To truly become his disciple? Any response that offers a *behavioral* answer (do these things, don't do these things) misses something crucial. It is, in fact, our deepest truest selves which must wrestle with the reality of the cross and come to grips with the reality of our sin, our need for a savior, and the matchless, incredible, astonishing gift of God's unequalled, unmerited grace.

About the Author

Aimee Stone Cooper is an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene. She attended Point Loma Nazarene University and Nazarene Theological Seminary before heading to George Fox Evangelical Seminary to earn a Doctorate of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation. Aimee loves Jesus, and is always looking for creative ways to engage her heart in her faith journey. “Going deeper” with Christ is

something Aimee highly esteems, and she loves spending her time encouraging others to do the same. Aimee is married to Chris. They live in Oregon, where they are foster parents and are expecting their first biological child. In the hectic-craziness of life, Aimee has come to see that she needs something to root and ground her in her faith. She has studied John Wesley and has written this book as a gift to the church in hopes that others will find encouragement and strength in the practices of Wesley which have come to mean so much for Aimee personally.

This curriculum has been written as an extension of Aimee's Doctor of Ministry project. Much of the content in this resource is replicated from her dissertation, *Means of Grace as Formative Holiness: The Role and Significance of John Wesley's Spiritual Formation Practices in the Pursuit of Christian Holiness for the Church of the Nazarene*. All of the references offered throughout this book are intended as helpful resources of additional information or study material on a particular subject or perspective. The structure of this book is intended to help Sunday School classes or small groups of Christians gather together and engage Wesley's means of grace practices. The small group format was chosen because of the high value Wesley placed on the significance of corporate fellowship in our Christian journey. The point of this particular curriculum, is to gift Christ's Church with a practical resource to engage Wesley's means of grace content in a new and fresh way. Therefore, some of his language has been updated to read in a more conversational way.

The Structure

The structure of this resource is intended to be as straightforward as possible.

- It has been written as a Leader's Guide for adult small group ministry, though it could certainly be helpful for any sojourner in your group.
- The size of your group can certainly vary, though due to the quite personal nature of some of the reflection questions, your group should not be larger than a group of 24 (including any and all leaders).
- At the start, a commitment to one another and to the program should be made—not because there is some magic within these pages, but because people will approach these topics differently if they are personally invested in the outcome and are dedicated to seeing it through. The experience will be much different (and likely quite disappointing) for someone choosing to be passive or disengaged in the process.
- Finally, it is assumed that not everyone will know the significance of John Wesley, or the doctrinal and theological history of Wesley's means of grace. Therefore, a brief primer is available before launching into the specific practices themselves. The information provided is intended to be helpful for both new believers as well as those who have been in the faith for a long time.

Overview

Section 1: A Brief Overview of Wesley's Means of Grace:

The practices Wesley valued are briefly discussed, and additional resources are offered for further study, activity, or conversation. Throughout the rest of

the curriculum, various means of grace activities will be offered and will be centered on a common unit or theme. The content in Section 1 is, therefore, intended as a brief overview to give context and perspective to Wesley's means of grace practices.

Section 2: Covenant Service:

A Covenant service has been offered here for your small group to participate in together. The content of the service is based on Wesley's service from 1781, though it has been altered and shortened. Many other versions are available online. The purpose of beginning the journey with a corporate covenant statement is multifaceted:

1. This is a journey that you will take in your personal walk, but it was never intended to be a private journey. You have chosen a group of people to journey with, and you will come to see they are a crucial part of your faith-story as well. As Christians we learn from, and are shaped by, those we journey with. A Covenant service is a reflection of both the personal and corporate nature of our journey in Christ.
2. This is a journey that will challenge and confront you at your deepest level. Honesty and humility are needed for any intentional journey towards depth in Christ. Honesty and humility are neither simple, nor do they come easily to us. We must, each and every one, recognize who we are, own up to our responsibility in who we become, and do so with humble hearts before a holy God. That is the only way true transformation can take place. A Covenant service is a meaningful and appropriate place to start.

3. The design of this curriculum is based directly on the writings of Wesley's means of grace; and, for Wesley, Christian formation does not "just happen." It is not coincidental. It happens intentionally, when men and women set their hearts on loving God and others better and more. This means that while there is no "magic wand" to make us holy, there are certainly methods of engaging the spiritual life which allow us to pursue holiness of heart and life in fullness and grace. These methods are significant because we must choose to engage and participate with God, or we are in danger of being formed by lesser things. A covenant service allows us to make a statement of intentionality: "This is who I am, this is who we are; this is what I need, this is what we need. Lord have mercy." And, by his grace, he will.

8 Units of Study, 5 Weeks Each

Following the covenant service, this resource is divided into eight 5-week units of study. Each unit is themed around a topic that is significant for Wesleyans:

- Unit 1: Holy Club/Small Group Discipleship
- Unit 2: Grace
- Unit 3: The Body of Christ
- Unit 4: Engaging the World
- Unit 5: Family Religion/Home Life
- Unit 6: Stewardship
- Unit 7: Social Justice

- Unit 8: Holiness of Heart and Life.

Each of these units begin with a summary overview of the topic. Each week within that unit of study then offers a different lesson or activity, directly related to Wesley's means of grace. Because people learn through repetition, and because Wesley's writings indicate a high priority on these specific activities, Prayer, Studying Scripture, Meditating on Scripture, Acts of Mercy, and Reflection are used as the foundational practices through which Wesley's means of grace will be encountered throughout each unit, so that students will be able to enter into familiar rhythms of encountering grace through these personal experiences. Wesley's means of grace conversation certainly spanned more variety—though for practical purposes, the majority of this resource intentionally focuses on Wesley's instituted means of grace practices (prayer, scripture, and Eucharist).

Specifically, every first week within each unit will focus on prayer, but it will be through the lens of that unit's particular theme. The prayer activities will vary from unit to unit. There are many ways to pray, and this resource offers a variety of opportunities to approach that particular means of grace. This book is designed with the hope that repetition, with fresh ideas of practical application, will allow you and your community to settle in to new and significant rhythms of encountering God.

With the exception of the "Acts of Mercy" section (week #4), each unit offers fresh ways to approach the various means of grace. Included in each "Acts of Mercy" section is a list of suggested activities. The list repeats each unit; it will be up to each group to determine what works best in their context and for their objective.

The structure of this book in unit form is intentional. Each unit settles around one key Wesleyan concept or ideology and offers 5 weeks of study. The sixth week is intended to be a break week, for those who would find that helpful. The scriptures and activities used in each unit are intended to be creative suggestions for engaging the means of grace, through the lens of each unit's overarching topic. This is meant to be a practical tool for those wanting to go deeper in their spirituality in a thoroughly Wesleyan perspective. Each week offers a distinct activity or activities to engage in, and questions to ponder or reflect upon. Through these activities, participants will be attending to Wesley's means of grace in unique ways. Because we were never meant to journey with Christ in isolation from each other, this work will be done best in and through community.

Advent / Holy Week

At the end of this resource there are two additional units, one specifically for Advent, and one for Holy Week. These are optional, based on the needs of your situation, and your church's calendar. They offer suggestions of how to approach those two significant Church seasons through Wesley's means of grace.

Communion

This curriculum instructs each group to set aside time at the end of each week's lesson to take communion together. (Check out Section 1 for more information on Wesley's take on this significant Christian encounter). The reasoning for this is simple: Wesley held a high view of communion, and believed that followers of Christ should not

neglect the discipline of taking communion as often as possible. On that reasoning alone, it seems appropriate to encourage each group to end each lesson with a time of reflection while experiencing the Lord's Supper together.

When viewed as the sacred encounter of transforming grace that it is, taking communion grounds us in the reality that we are in desperate need of what we do not have and cannot earn on our own. Communion centers us around the cross—the one place where we are unified in our brokenness, and with our own, personal uniquenesses, yet, here we are fully and wholly loved.

Many make the argument that communion should be taken less often so that it does not become too familiar and lose its sacredness. I would suggest that taking the Lord's Supper can never lose its power—it is not something we have conjured up or created. Instead, it is more like the intimacies between a husband and a wife: sacred in and of itself, common in that it has been a part of the human experience from the beginning—yet, profoundly unique to the people who are experiencing it now. It is necessary for growth in intimacy, and it is powerfully and mysteriously more than the act or ritual itself. To be blunt—who of us in our right minds would neglect intimacies with our spouse so that our rare times together could feel “more special?” It is an offensive thought to a happy and love-filled marriage. And, likewise, that kind of thinking would be a gross misunderstanding of the profound grace, mercy, power, and intimacy which communion offers to the sincere seeker.

Some of us who struggle with ritual might choose to view this as an opportunity to reconsider our approach to the holy space of the Lord's Table. For just this

year, might you consider giving yourself over to the process—to be receptive (even through repetition) to something new, fresh, and wonderful?

For all, encountering Christ’s love, grace, mercy, joy, hope, strength, forgiveness, and mercy through the act of coming together with others experiencing the same wonders is a gift indeed. You may find yourself profoundly surprised.

Application

In conclusion, let me offer a brief word concerning the title of this project: *Formative Holiness*. There are some for whom the idea of holiness is a static concept, meaning a person becomes holy and is therefore completely, always, and forevermore holy. There are many problems with this perspective. Primarily, it is neither a Wesleyan concept, nor a biblical one. Wesley certainly uses perfection language *ad nauseam* throughout his writings. This has led some to errantly believe in an “arrived” state of perfected holiness. However, when you survey the whole of Wesley’s teachings and understand his perfection conversation in context with all that he preached, taught, and lived, it is unreasonable to think that we Christians can ever arrive at perfection while living on this earth. Wesley certainly believed that we are continuously formed, and he taught that growth in grace is necessary for all who desire to be fully Christ’s.

Formative, then, alludes to the reality that we are developmental beings. We are constantly in the process of being shaped by the influences in our lives: family, friends, work context, community, the media, how we spend our free time, what we choose to eat, whether we exercise, how much sleep and rest we get, what we do with our money and resources, and how we are entertained. None of us are stagnant or inert

people; we are all, always, in motion. The reality is that how we live our lives, the choices we make, and the choices others make—all impact the trajectory of our life. Our faith journey is an integral part of our lives, but it is unrealistic to presume that while our physical lives are always changing, our faith journey would somehow ever cease because it has reached some mark of completed perfection.

Of course, our journey will cease when we leave this earthly home and find ourselves eternally with Christ in glory. However, it is an unreasonable, and a non-biblical perspective for us to live out the rest of our lives here on earth without an impetus for growth. The perception of an arrived state of perfection, in that sense, would be a stagnant existence. This is profoundly antithetical to the gospel experience of the life that comes from living in the Spirit. Motionless religion is not the reality of life-giving faith in the One who was and is and is to come.

Our faith-journey in Christ mimics our physical reality. We are, each and every one, continually shaped, or formed, by the choices we make and by the engagement of others in our lives. We are developmental beings. Our faith-journey cannot lay dormant if we desire to grow in love of God and others. We must move in that direction. Constantly. We must intentionally choose to engage those behaviors that would allow us to receive God's grace in a new and fresh way to enable us to love God and others better, deeper, and more authentically. We must pursue holiness of heart and life and be ever formed into people who are more holy today than we were yesterday, last week, or last year. We will never arrive, until we take our last breath and find ourselves in the permanent arms of true love and peace.

Holiness is the reality that our call as Christians is simple: to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength... and to love our neighbors as ourselves. These two precepts are inextricably linked. Holiness is as much about how we treat others as it is about how we approach our personal faith. Holiness of heart and life is the goal, and it is always—ALWAYS—in the context of relationship to and with others. Right relationship with God cannot happen if we are not pursuing right relationship with others.

Wesley spent much of his life writing about holiness, and much has been written on his perspective. For our purposes here, let us remember these words from scripture, “The end of every commandment is love, out of a pure heart, with faith unfeigned.”¹⁹⁴ That is the pursuit of holiness: to love from a pure heart with genuine and authentic faith. That is the invitation of grace. That is the basic intention of the gospel in our lives.

One crucial thing to remember is that God is still the master and the centerpiece in all of this. It would be easy to see the objective of loving God and loving others as achievable... and, then, attempt to pursue it in our own power. That will never work. It just won't. It can't. We are incapable of being who God has called us to be—only he can shape us into his likeness and grant us his heartbeat for the life we have been given. We do not have the capability of loving God and others better and more. Only God, in his infinite mercy, can gift us the grace necessary to become more loving, pure, and authentic.

¹⁹⁴ This is Wesley's wording of 1 Timothy 1:5, and it appears in the introduction of his *Means of Grace* sermon.

It is *God's work* to turn our lives into reflections of his holiness, but we must let him. We must participate with what he is up to, and allow his grace to sustain us, convict us, redeem us, and establish in us his kingdom perspective. No activity or practice can ever create a holy heart or mind. It is God's work in our lives we are dependent upon. And, we are utterly dependent upon him. However, we can choose to open our lives (heart, soul, and mind) to his grace, and allow his grace and love and mercy and sense of justice to transform us. That is the invitation, or significance, of the means of grace practices.

Formative Holiness, then, is a phrase intended to point us toward the reality that we are being formed, and the means of grace are a significant opportunity to be shaped by grace into people who value what Wesley highly valued—holiness of heart and life. These practices enable us to be intentionally purposed for the Kingdom of God; to grow deeper, become more real, and to seek Christ more profoundly today than we were able to yesterday. As Christ is formed in us, which scripture tells us is an ongoing priority of a Christian faith journey, we become holy reflections of his heart and life and grace. It is God's grace alone, and it is his work alone. We have nothing but ourselves to offer to the process. And yet, that is exactly what we must do—offer our truest selves to the process. As we do so, we realize the invitation is ours—to grow in love of God and others, and to become ever increasing reflections of his heart in this broken world.

That is the challenge and the call.

SECTION 1: WESLEY’S MEANS OF GRACE, AN OVERVIEW

(NOTE: Your group should read and discuss this section prior to engaging the curriculum for the year as it gives the group some background information, and might spur on fruitful conversation for your time together.)

Have you ever heard the phrase “means of grace?” If not, you are in for a wonderful journey of discovery. If so, have you ever wondered what the phrase really means? Perhaps you have heard the phrase, or for some it might be new. What are the “means”? What are they means for? Or of? Or, toward what end? Why are they significant? How do we engage them in our world today? For the next year, your small group has committed to gathering together to figure out the answers to these questions.

The means of grace are simultaneously simple and complex. They are simple in that many of these are straightforward activities. You will recognize most as being very familiar:

- Prayer
- Reading scripture
- Taking communion
- Serving others

...just to name a few.

But, have you ever considered the way you approach these activities? Take prayer, for instance—do you always pray in the same way? For the same things? With the same result? Have you ever considered looking at how and why you pray, and

opening yourself up to consider the ways God is wanting to meet you in those sacred moments?

To be sure, all of the activities listed above are appropriate pursuits for any and all Christians. No matter where you find yourself in your faith journey, it is always appropriate to seek God, to talk with him, to read his word, to reflect upon your life in Christ, and to serve others. Yet, the invitation within these pages is to be challenged beyond what might seem familiar in order to gain a more rich experience with each activity.

The subject matter of Wesley's means of grace is also a complex one. It is both simple, and complex, which can make it confusing. Most certainly Wesley spent a great deal of his life writing about and referring to the practices he called means of grace. But, did you know, that Wesley himself never created a perfect, finished, comprehensive list? He wrote about the means, he chose to engage these practices throughout his personal life, and he instructed the early Methodists to do the same, but he never synthesized a completed list.

Which is kind of a bummer, because that means that when you read Wesley, you find many activities grouped in differing places throughout his writings. Wesley mentioned different activities as means of grace in various contexts, which makes it quite difficult for anyone to create a thoroughly extensive resource of his means.

Getting back to Wesley, scholars disagree about the terminology, or wording, of his practices as well. Some use "instituted and prudential" means of grace, others use "acts of piety and acts of mercy." And, some overlook the "general means of grace" which are equally important, though they are written about far less than the other

categories of practices. In other words, for Wesley, all we know is that he highly valued certain practices as being both necessary and fruitful in the lives of Christ-followers. Yet, as much as Wesley valued these practices, he never spent the time to give us one resource encompassing or explaining them all.

Because of this, please remember: this curriculum is NOT intended to be a comprehensive resource of “must do activities.” Rather, it is written to be an introductory resource, accessible to those who are new in their faith journeys, and applicable to those who have walked with Jesus for decades.

Likewise, from Wesley’s perspective, none of the means of grace practices are intended to be understood as a checklist of actions to perform (like folding your laundry or dusting behind the refrigerator). Rather, they are invitations to encounter God’s grace, and to be transformed into the image of Christ for the sake of others. The means of grace are as simple, and as profoundly beautiful, as that.

One word of caution. Wesley is abundantly clear in his sermons and throughout his writings that there is no merit in attending to any of these means in and of themselves. None, whatsoever.

Zero. Zip. Zilch.

These are certainly good things to do, and they can be meaningful insofar as Christ meets us in them. They are not, however, intrinsically valuable at all. Wesley went so far as to call them worthless. He writes these few cautions specifically:¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ All of the references listed here are from Wesley’s Sermon: 16, *Means of Grace*, unless otherwise noted.

- The means matter, only as far as they draw us toward and produce in us a “renewed mind;” knowledge and love of God, and a practical love of others.
- They are dangerous: without God’s active presence they can actually turn men’s heart against our holy God.
- It is only by the grace of God, and through the power of the spirit that these activities have any merit whatsoever. Otherwise, they are lifeless and worthless.

We know that there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or the bread and wine received in the Lord’s Supper; but that it is God alone who is the Giver of every good gift, the Author of all grace; that the whole power is of him, whereby, through any of these, there is any blessing conveyed to our soul. We know, likewise, that he is able to give the same grace, though there were no means on the face of the earth. In this sense, we may affirm, that, with regard to God, there is no such thing as means; seeing he is equally able to work whatsoever pleaseth him, by any, or by none at all.

~ John Wesley, Sermon 16: The Means of Grace

In other words, God’s grace is equally able to abound in places where Christians are seeking him and they do not have access to corporate prayer, the written word of God or the taking of the Lord’s Supper. God, in his almighty power is not, has never been, and will never be limited to these, or any means of bestowing his magnificent grace.

- Wesley cautions that the means of grace will never, and can never atone for sin. It is the blood of Christ alone that allows for anyone and all to be reconciled to God. There is no other way.
- Finally, Wesley points out that there are some who can abuse the means of grace “to the destruction of their souls.” Wesley was firmly aware there are some who

presume they are fully Christian because they do certain things, yet Christ hasn't been fully real to their true selves yet. There are others who think they are infallible Christians because they practice Christ's means of grace for their lives, though they do so, in Wesley's phrasing, "barely." Both of these groups of people are sadly mistaken. Engaging any spiritual practice without the honesty and humility that is needed to truly seek the Holy God is profoundly detrimental. We must examine our hearts and allow Christ to rule, and seek him alone; there is no merit in anything else. Christ alone (and his grace) is the gift.

For Wesley, the most significant tenet in this conversation is, "By grace are ye saved." He writes, "You are saved from your sins, from the guilt and power thereof, you are restored to the favor and image of God, not for any works, merits, or deservings of yours, but by the free grace, the mere mercy of God, through the merits of his well-beloved Son: you are thus saved, not by any power, wisdom, or strength, which is in you, or in any other creature; but merely through the grace or power of the Holy Ghost, which worketh all in all."

It is a significantly important tenet to remember: these are but means of encountering God's grace; there is no power of salvation in any of these activities, nor any benefit apart from God and what work he wants to do in and through them. In other words, this is not about our agenda—it is about God's. And, the only way we can truly experience his plan for us in these practices, is to be as authentic as we are able. These are all about honesty and humility as we:

- open ourselves up to God's grace
- recognize where he is already at work

- respond to God’s grace
- allow God’s grace to transform us.

Any other agenda with these activities will steer you away from their powerful invitation, and could form in you a hardness of heart toward God and his mercy.

Following is a list of the most commonly understood means of grace, according to Wesley and his writings. Remember, this is not intended to be a comprehensive list. Rather, this is offered as an overview of the practices Wesley valued, and the rationale he gave for valuing these practices.

Instituted Means of Grace (Acts of Piety)¹⁹⁶

Instituted means are those activities Christ himself established for his Church. Christ prayed, and he instructed us to pray. Christ engaged the scriptures, and it is clear his followers are to do the same. Christ inaugurated communion, or the Lord’s Supper (or in some contexts, the Eucharist) on the night he was betrayed—he commands that we do the same, and remember his precious gift. “Instituted means” are therefore means of grace Wesley points to directly in the life and teachings of Christ. Sometimes, these are referred to as acts of piety in Wesley’s writings. Most scholars agree the following activities should be included in this list.

Prayer:

¹⁹⁶ All of the references listed here are from Wesley’s Sermon: 16, *Means of Grace*, unless otherwise noted.

Wesley said, “All who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of prayer.” For Wesley, this would have included corporate praying, private praying, and intercessory prayer:

- We are to pray because Jesus himself taught us to pray and to ask (Matthew 7:7–8).
- Jesus told us to ask and he promised it would be effectual (Matthew 7:9–11; Luke 11:13).
- Jesus said, “Ask and it shall be given unto you” (Luke 11:5, 7–9).
- Consider the story of the widow in the Gospel of Luke who changes the judge’s mind and notes that God shall “avenge his own elect” if they “pray and faint not” (Luke 18:1–5).
- Matthew 6:6 is an invitation from Christ to “wait for the blessings of God in private prayer, together with a positive promise, that, by this means, we shall obtain the request of our lips.”
- James writes that if we lack wisdom we should ask of God in prayer, and that it would be given unto us (James 4:2 and 1:5).

These thoughts offer a comprehensive overview of the significance of prayer both for the believer and the non-believer. Wesley articulates the belief that prayer is not only commanded for us in scripture (thus we ought to comply), but that prayer is also a strong invitation to encounter God’s grace in unique ways.

You will be given the opportunity to encounter various prayer activities throughout the coming year, with the objective of learning to prayer in new and dynamic ways.

Searching the Scriptures:

Wesley writes, “Second. All who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in searching the Scriptures.” Wesley considered searching the Scriptures to be a means of grace “whereby God not only gives, but also confirms and increases, true wisdom”:

- “Searching the scriptures” implies reading, hearing and meditating upon the Bible.
- John 5:39 says we are to search the scriptures because they testify of Christ.
- Many in the early church believed because of the scriptures (Acts 17:11-12).
- Searching the scriptures is a means of grace “whereby God not only gives, but also confirms and increases, true wisdom” (2 Timothy 3:15).
- All scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- Searching the scriptures “implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon.”

While Wesley does not expound on these phrases, he is clear that there is merit in both the study of scripture, and in the act of reflecting upon scripture. There is the scholastic, heady, searching for information (it is important to know what the word of God says), and there is the reflective, transformative, resting in scripture (we are invited to allow the Word of God to speak into our hearts, minds, and lives—and transform our thinking and living).

- For Wesley, searching the scriptures is not optional; all who desire to encounter God's grace are to wait for it in searching the scriptures.

You will be given the opportunity to encounter various scriptures throughout each unit and week. Challenge yourself and try to read the various passages in numerous versions. Each and every translation of scripture offers the same message with different words; reading in multiple versions can help you gain a stronger sense of the deep meanings of the scripture passages.

The Lord's Supper (Eucharist)

Wesley held a highly sacramental view of the Eucharist. He was explicit in writing that Christians should not neglect to take the Lord's Supper as often as possible.¹⁹⁷

- Taking communion is a "plain command of Christ."
- "A Second reason why every Christian should do this as often as he can, is, because the benefits of doing it are so great to all that do it in obedience to him; viz., the forgiveness of our past sins and the present strengthening and refreshing of our souls. In this world we are never free from temptations. Whatever way of life we are in, whatever our condition be, whether we are sick or well, in trouble or at ease, the enemies of our souls are watching to lead us into sin. And too often they prevail over us. Now, when we are convinced of having sinned against God,

¹⁹⁷ For further study, read Wesley's Sermon: 101, *The Duty of Constant Communion*.

what surer way have we of procuring pardon from him, than the "showing forth the Lord's death;" and beseeching him, for the sake of his Son's sufferings, to blot out all our sins."¹⁹⁸

- Thirdly, remember that the early church Christians took the Lord's Supper as often as they could: as a part of every Lord's Day Service, and as often as every day of the week. Wesley implores that we would do well to take communion as often as we are invited to.
- Wesley goes so far as to say, "that if we consider the Lord's Supper as a command of Christ, no man can have any pretense to Christian piety, who does not receive it (not once a month, but) as often as he can."

Communion, for Wesley, is an instituted means of grace because Christ himself taught us, and commanded us, to remember his sacrifice. Taking communion is much more significant than a mere remembrance, it is an encounter with transformative grace, whereby a sinner is able to claim the gift of Christ for the propitiation of his sin.

Wesley writes, "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."¹⁹⁹ Wesley taught the Christians should not neglect taking the Lord's Supper, but should rather do so

¹⁹⁸ Wesley, *The Duty of Constant Communion*.

¹⁹⁹ Wesley's Means of Grace sermon.

as often as possible. Therefore, taking communion is a suggested activity at the end of each week's study throughout this resource.

You will be given the opportunity to take communion with your group each week.

Fasting²⁰⁰

For Wesley, fasting is not a question of “if” for Christians, but “when.” He refers to fasting as the one means of grace most Christians have taken to an extreme: some have overvalued it and taken the ritual far beyond the invitation of scripture, and others neglect the practice altogether. “[Fasting] is not the end, but it is a precious means thereto; a means which God himself has ordained, and in which therefore, when it is duly used, he will surely give us his blessing.” Fasting is a critical component of one's Christian journey. It is, however precious, still a mere venue for God's grace to encounter vulnerabilities in our lives, and transform us into more authentic representatives of his holy heart. If you are interested in more of his perspective on fasting, begin by reading “Sermon 27: Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse Seven.”

Most of the time we consider fasting to be from food; of course please check with your medical care provider before beginning any fasting activity—and limit your choices to those that are safe for you and your health. Also, fasting is an activity we often consider quite personal. Consider fasting as a group and reflecting together on the struggles and benefits of such a commitment. Fast from one meal, or from entertainment

²⁰⁰ All of the references listed here are from Wesley's Sermon: 27, *Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: Discourse Seven*, unless otherwise noted.

as a group, at an established time; then gather and reflect upon your experiences in a way that is mutually beneficial.

Christian Fellowship

Most Wesleyan scholars agree that Christian conference, or fellowship, should be included in any conversation of Wesley's Instituted means of grace. The gathering together of believers to encourage one another on in the faith, through mutual submission of deep accountability to and for each other, seems a very high priority throughout Wesley's life; so much so, that both John and Charles Wesley established and led what came to be known as the Holy Club during their time at Oxford. Their practice laid the foundation for the early Methodist movement which prioritized organization around classes, societies and bands of believers. These groups were set apart for mutual, intentionally purposeful, diligent, attentive conversation and accountability.

Randy Maddox offers a significant perspective: that the "Christian Conference" groups (which had several names—class meetings, bands, penitent bands, and select societies) held what he calls a "primary purpose...to support members' *responsible* participation in the transforming work of God's *grace*."²⁰¹ In other words, for Wesley and ensuing Wesleyans, the intentional gathering together of fellow believers, with the purpose of honest conversation and authentic relationship, offers a unique, significant, and crucial opportunity to participate together in God's grace at work. For any who have

²⁰¹ Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 212.

been a part of an intentional community of believers like this, there is certainly a unique opportunity for intimacy in Christ, honesty with ourselves and others, and transformation which cannot happen in isolation.

The requirements for such a gathering would include commitment to the group, trust, and a willingness to be vulnerable. Intimacy in Christ is not a fruit of happenstance. When participants are not committed, or when they don't frequently show up and engage the conversation, the structure falls apart. Being deeply committed to something "ritualistic," or something that happens again and again at a set time and place is not something North Americans in the 21st century are used to prioritizing. With the exception of events we have paid to participate in (youth soccer, community events, or book clubs for instance), our culture is one that has become lazy. Commitments are not a cultural priority. For such a group or club as Wesley enjoyed to be encountered today, a high priority and commitment would have to be placed on showing up.

Second, trust is earned. Trust takes time. It is a mutual fruit of purposeful and deep relationship. Some people are just not capable of engaging a group like Wesley envisioned because they are not trustworthy. If there is not trust within your group, if there is not a willingness to hold sacred your time together, and hold in confidence what is shared in your time together, then true community and intimate relationships in Christ cannot be forged, because people are not safe to be authentic. This is crucial. Trust must be earned, and it must be a high priority of any such group to honor, respect, and protect one another through the journey. So that the third and final characteristic of the group can be found: true authenticity.

In order to be authentic people, we must be in relationships with people that are free from prejudice, free from hierarchy, free from hypocrisy, and are without condemnation. Authenticity flows from courageous hearts being willing to be both honest and humble with others who are also committed to the same level of true vulnerability. Only in that context can relationships can be forged which mutually edify the whole towards more depth in Christ and love of God and for others.

Prudential Means of Grace (Acts of Mercy)

As has been previously noted, John Wesley did not ever create a systematic or comprehensive list of the means of grace practices. Some scholars point to various writings of Wesley when using the wording, “instituted and prudential” means of grace, or “acts of piety and acts of mercy” means of grace. Keep in mind, the terminology is not the significant piece here; rather, the ideology behind the different categories is what is meaningful. Wesley’s instituted means, listed above, are practices which Christ explicitly ordained for his church, either by direct command or example. Prudential means of grace, which will be briefly discussed in this section, are practices which are equally important in the life of the believer. These are modes of expression, or the way ones faith is lived out. Throughout the prudential means of grace, there is a significant invitation to reach beyond one’s own needs and be the hands and feet of Jesus.

A general list of Wesley’s prudential means of grace can be found in his Sermon 43: *The Scripture Way of Salvation*. There, these practices are specifically listed and are considered to be particularly significant and “necessary to sanctification”:

First, all works of piety; such as public prayer, family prayer, and praying in our closet; receiving the supper of the Lord; searching

the Scriptures, by hearing, reading, meditating; and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows. Secondly, all works of mercy; whether they relate to the bodies or souls of men; such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted; such as the endeavoring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feeble-minded, to succor the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death. This is the repentance, and these the "fruits meet for repentance," which are necessary to full sanctification. This is the way wherein God hath appointed His children to wait for complete salvation.²⁰²

Here we find the distinguishing importance of all means of grace as being necessary unto sanctification. Wesley does not offer a caveat that some of these are to be paid more attention, nor does he structure his thinking around an order whereby some matter more than others. Instead, Wesley openly claims these are practices that are evident in true Christianity and significant for all believers.

For our purposes in this resource, this list of Wesley's should be carefully noted. During Week #4 of every unit, your small group will be given the opportunity to engage various means of grace practices as you see fit. Some weeks might be more extensive than others; for those times, your group might choose to meet at a different time or place. Some weeks might be more simple engagement due to time or financial constraints. Some groups might want to undertake a particular ministry opportunity and repeat it every unit during week 4. Others might want to approach each unit separately

²⁰² John Wesley, Sermon 43, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, III.5. <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-43-the-scripture-way-of-salvation/>. John Wesley, Sermon 92, *On Zeal*. II.5. <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-92-on-zeal>.

and choose various activities in different units to reach a broader need throughout their community.

Keep in mind, the point of this is not to “hit every practice on this list,” but to offer a time, during each unit, to serve others as a group. The significance of these means of grace, in addition to the instituted means listed above, is that these prudential means are practical applications of true faith. Please keep in mind, there is not a hierarchy in Wesleyan writings. All of the means of grace are significant opportunities to be shaped by God and his heart. The prudential means, however, are practical applications of the work Christ is doing. In participating in them, or in reaching beyond our own needs we are stretched. As we serve through acts of love for others, we are granted the unique opportunity to encounter grace in a dynamic way.

SECTION 2: COVENANT RENEWAL

Introduction

For some, a covenant renewal service might seem an odd way to begin our journey. It is, however an appropriate place to both begin and end your journey together. It is therefore suggested the covenant renewal service, or something like it, might mark both the beginning and the conclusion of your time with Wesley's means of grace as a committed group of sojourners.

One of the reasons this is so very profound, is that throughout North American Christianity much of our language is completely individualistic. Our *personal* walk with Christ, our *private* thought life, our *individual* perspectives, our *secret* beliefs and judgments, etc. To be certain, your walk with Christ is infinitely personal; that does not mean it is private. In fact, while it will always be personal, it cannot be both private (isolated from others) and authentically Christian. We were never meant to be quarantined by ourselves as we seek to follow Christ. We are, always have been, and always will be, mysteriously accountable to and for each other. The body of Christ is provocative, diverse, exceptional, flawed, and eternal. We really do need each other.

The covenant service is such an appropriate place to mark the beginning and the end of this journey with Wesley.

- The first thing a covenant service does is remind us of the sense that we are in this together. Who I am in Christ is not necessarily *dependent* on who you are in Christ, but my health and wholeness in Christ certainly is *reflective* of who we are in Christ together. In other words, I cannot be who I am in Christ apart from who you and I are in Christ together. It is “we” before our Abba as much as it is me

before my God. This is a really significant corrective to popular American spirituality.

- The second thing a covenant service does is provide us the opportunity for self-reflection, confession, surrender, dedication, and consecration. If this seems intense—well, it is supposed to be. One difficulty many in contemporary circles have with Wesley is how very seriously he takes things like consecration. The word is a big one. But, for those of us serious about “getting real” in our faith, it should not cause us fear. Consecration means “being set apart.” In other words, being intentional and choosing to go “all in.” This covenant service is one way to do that. It is an opportunity to reflect upon what it is you are intending to do in the next year—to purposefully set apart your life in Christ to encounter the grace of God at work in a new and profound way.
- The covenant service is intended to be a sacred time, and taken seriously. As you will see, the language is intentionally strong. Wesley was not haphazard about his approach to spirituality and neither should we be. Wesley introduced the covenant service in 1775 as an annual renewal of commitment for Methodist Societies and it was perceived as a sacred time. For many, a covenant service is a sacred time of consecration, of being set apart. For some in your group, this might seem quite redundant. The important thing is not the specific words, but the authentic sentiment of confession, surrender, dedication, and consecration. If a different structure would be helpful for your context, feel free to modify this service, or do something completely different.

A Few Words of Practical Help

The following service was created from John Wesley's official covenant service, with substantial creative license. It is not intended to be a replica of his covenant service; rather his service serves as the foundation for our small group covenant "kick-off." Several other versions are available online. If the length of this service does not meet your needs, there are a plethora of services available for your use, and many of them offer updated language. The purpose here is to set aside the beginning of your time together for renewal and focus. Much of the language is Wesley's, though not all. This covenant service offers groups a chance to commit their selves to the significance of the journey ahead.

Making a year-long commitment is not something North American Protestant Christians are used to doing. Keep in mind the commitment you are making is to pursuing Christ wholeheartedly. For some, that will mean engaging this curriculum on a weekly basis with other likeminded believers. For others, life will get in the way. The commitment you are making is to Christ, and not to this curriculum. The covenant is about you: your heart, your mind, your life in Christ. Yes, the journey will be much more fruitful if it can be done alongside a group of committed Christians journeying together, but, you are not marrying your small group. (Although, Wesley might have been proud of you if you had done so!)

These specific words in this service hold absolutely no magic. The attitude with which you approach this service matters much more than the liturgy you speak. If

your context does not allow for a service of this magnitude, feel free to simplify in whatever way best suits your needs.

If your context is not familiar with or comfortable with a more liturgical worship experience, consider rotating who the “leader” is throughout the service. Perhaps if every voice gets the opportunity to “lead” it will feel less formal. Oftentimes, adding a variety of voices allows for more engagement from a group of people, especially if this is a group for whom there really isn’t a one-person “pastoral leader.” Sharing the “leading” opportunities might help everyone gain ownership of the experience as well.

Finally, this service will take some intentional planning and pre-teaching, especially if those in your group are not used to a liturgical style of worship. Worship songs will need to be chosen, and leaders will need to be instructed. Here are some tidbits you might find helpful in connecting this experience with your group.

- The language is explicitly us/we, not “I” focused—this is a journey you are committing to undertake together.
- The structure is easy to follow—everything you will need to say has been written down for you, with the exception of scripture verses which will need to be looked up and read aloud.
- Because this is a structured time of worship, pay close attention. If you are being asked to read something that does not resonate with your personal experience, perhaps it will with your neighbor. For instance, many of the laments of scripture are not prayers a majority of North Americans in the 21st century can resonate with, yet it is still helpful to read those Psalms and honor those for whom those words are honest.

- HOWEVER, if you are not ready to make this personal commitment, then by all means, do not do so. The following is a serious time of reflection. Do not take this lightly or enter half-heartedly. You will only be doing yourself a great disservice. If you are not in a place where you can honestly say “I am in,” then it would be better for you to refrain, or to opt out. God takes our commitment to him seriously, and it is severely important that you are by no means coerced or forced into any part of this commitment.
- Finally, pay attention to what you think and feel throughout the covenant service. It will be a great and fruitful thing to talk about during your group’s time of reflection and remembering. (Week #5 in every Unit).

Covenant Service Order of Worship

Call to worship:

LEADER: Come, let us join ourselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant which will never be forgotten.

ALL: Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name through Christ our Lord. Amen.

LEADER: We come together today to be reminded of our deep need of God's grace. We must all recognize today that we have sinned, and confess that we fall short of God's glory.

We must also acknowledge that we have no forgiveness outside of God's miraculous grace. That Christ, alone, is the way, the truth and the life.

Then, we must humbly and honestly concede that our need of his grace is deeper than forgiveness of sins—Christ wants to cleanse our hearts and purify our lives. And, the Spirit will do this very thing today, if we will allow him to.

We must choose today whether we will turn to Christ, with his yoke, his cross, and his crown, or whether we will turn to the snares of the evil one—wealth, pleasure, comfort...and death. Eternal separation from life, love, peace, and the God who created us. With Christ, we have hope of glory. We also have a promise that this road will be difficult. Ease and comfort are not promised. Yet, we must choose to submit to his cross, and his yoke, and serve him alone.

We must choose, but we must not make this choice lightly.

Today we ask for a fresh experience of God's grace to renew us in Christ, sustain us, and transform us into his likeness.

ALL: Today we come. Today we choose. Today, we covenant to seek Christ, to turn from our sin, and to pursue the Almighty God, maker of heaven and of earth, with our whole selves. Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on us, your children.

[Songs of Worship and Praise]

[Feel free to choose whatever song or songs of worship and praise will resonate with your group. Consider the lyrics to the songs carefully; you are making a corporate statement of prayer in your sung worship. Choose songs that are both familiar to those in your group, and are also sacred. Select songs that point to Christ and his power over sin, God's magnificent grace, and the power of the Holy Spirit for his people.]

LEADER: Today we come to recognize who we are in Christ, and to celebrate his gift of grace, which is free to all, but costly always. We acknowledge that it is not just our personal need for salvation, but that we, as a community and a group of followers of Christ, who make up but a tiny portion of the body of Christ, are in great need of the grace of God. We admit that this is both communal and personal. We choose, today, that this year we will be people who love and serve the Lord Jesus the Christ with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. And, we do so together, as individuals who make up a whole.

ALL: Lord, Christ, may it be so.

READ: John 1:1–17.

LEADER: Jesus, we acknowledge you are the Word of God, You are the light of the world, and through you alone we are granted the right to become children of God.

ALL: Lord, Christ, grant that we might become true Children of God, and heirs with you.

LEADER: Jesus, we acknowledge we are unworthy of this gift; it is truly a gift of grace from your hand alone.

ALL: Lord, Christ, create in us a pure heart, and renew in us a steadfast and right spirit. Do not cast us from your presence, or take your Holy Spirit from us. We confess that against you, and you alone, have we sinned and done what is evil in your sight. Restore to us the joy of your salvation, and grant us a willing spirit to sustain us, that we may be wholly yours.

LEADER: Do you deeply sense your need for a Savior?

ALL: We do. We confess that we have sinned, and our salvation comes only from the hand of Jesus Christ, the one and only Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

LEADER: All our hope lies in Jesus the Christ.

ALL: Lord, be merciful to us. We have no hope apart from you. We know that we can do nothing to earn your favor, nor can we earn your grace. Prayers alone cannot help us. Hearing your word, alone, is not enough. Even if we live “perfectly,” unless there is a heart change, it is all for nothing. What shall we do?

LEADER: We must choose today to let our sins go. We must also choose to let our righteousness go. Christ came not to minister to the healthy, but to heal the sick; he

came not to call the righteous but to call sinners to repentance and to offer hope. To give beauty for ashes, and to make us whole. He came to seek and to save all who are lost. We must acknowledge our need for a Savior.

ALL: We trust Jesus the Christ, and him alone for the forgiveness of our sin. He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one gets access to the Father apart from Christ. His life, his cross, his empty grave has provided everything we need for the forgiveness of our sin. We accept that grace today. Lord, Christ, forgive us. Have mercy on us. Show us how to live in your truth.

READ: 1 John 1:5–2:6.

ALL: We confess, we believe, we receive.

LEADER: Will you come, today, and throw yourselves upon Christ's mercy?

ALL: We come, Lord. We believe, Lord. We throw ourselves upon your grace and mercy alone. We trust your blood to cleanse us from all sin. Lord Christ, in you and

you alone will we trust, and rest, and hope. Renew in us your merciful gift of new life, today.

LEADER: Let us remember that this is a personal choice, and it is also a communal commitment. We are choosing today to be marked for Christ and Christ alone. Let us, then, teach us the prayer the Lord himself taught us to pray.

ALL: Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory. Forever. Amen.

LEADER: We now yield ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ. As his servants, we must give up the dominion and control of ourselves to him alone. As his heirs we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness,

But rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:13).

LEADER: Let us give ourselves to the Lord in faithful commitment.

ALL: We are yours, Lord, and yours alone. We belong to you. We honor you. We dedicate ourselves to your service.

LEADER: In choosing to be wholly set apart for the glory of God, we are making a serious commitment to spend our lives for his kingdom purposes. Some tasks we might be asked to do will be a natural fit for our gifting, our interests, and our desires. Others will stretch us and make us uncomfortable; oftentimes following Christ and living for his kingdom requires a serious self-denial. As servants of Christ, we must confess his name, even if it costs us shame, reproach, or our very lives. We live in a secular world, which does not understand, or value, the way of the Kingdom of God. We may be asked to suffer for being radically counter-cultural. We must learn to be in the world, without being of the world. It does not matter what Christ expects from us, we must yield ourselves to his complete will. We cannot take this call lightly. His covenant terms are simple and straightforward: it is all or nothing. Are you still ready to be covenantal citizens of Christ's Kingdom?

ALL: Lord, Christ have mercy. If you will take us, and accept us as your own, if you will employ us as your servants, we will obey you on your terms. We give up our rights.

LEADER: Impose on us any condition you please.

ALL: Write your law on our hearts.

LEADER: Call us to whatever assignment you will.

ALL: Let us be your servants.

LEADER: Call us to whatever kind of life you will, Lord.

ALL: Send us wherever you will, Lord.

LEADER: Let us be vessels of silver or gold, or vessels of wood or stone.

ALL: As long as we may be vessels of your honor, we are content.

LEADER: If we are not the head, nor the eye, nor the ear, nor any of the nobler and more honorable parts you employ in your body, allow us to be the hands, the feet, or any of the lowest and least esteemed of all your servants.

ALL: Lord, put us to work for you, doing whatever you will; we will identify with whoever you want us to associate with. We are willing to work, and we are willing to suffer. Lord, Christ, have mercy on us.

LEADER: Let us be employed for you,

ALL: Or, laid aside for you.

LEADER: Let us be exalted for you,

ALL: Or trodden underfoot for you.

LEADER: You may make us full, or you may make us empty.

ALL: You may give us all things, or you may give us nothing at all.

LEADER: Lord, Christ, have mercy on us.

ALL: We freely and heartily give all that we are to your pleasure and your disposal. We are yours, alone, Lord. Now, and forevermore.

LEADER: Friends, we must one last time, search our heart and be confident that we are choosing, today, to make this kind of radical, covenant with God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. First, we must search our hearts and consider our sins, and decide if we are truly ready, and willing, and choosing, to repent of them all.

ALL: Lord, Christ, have mercy on us.

LEADER: We must focus the attention of our heart and put our minds toward meaning the words we have said. Covenanting our lives to the life of God is the most serious commitment we will ever make.

ALL: Lord, Christ, we choose you today.

LEADER: Third, we must take hold of the covenant faithfulness of God. This covenant is not something we can do on our own. We must choose to participate in this covenant with the eternal God. We must offer all we are. Yet it is not in our own strength. On our own, we are unable to keep this promise. We can, however, trust in the faithfulness, the holiness, the grace and the strength of our Almighty God.

ALL: Holy God, we surrender to you, and to Your Kingdom realities today. We acknowledge that we offer nothing but our whole selves. We recognize it is by your power, and yours alone, that we are able to do this.

LEADER: Fourth, we must resolve to be faithful. This commitment is not something we can change our minds about tomorrow, or next week, when life gets stressful, and when the follies of comfort are calling. We must choose, this day, to surrender ourselves to Christ, which means—we no longer belong to ourselves or to sin.

We now belong fully, and wholly to God. We must decide today that we will do everything we can, daily, to give up our lives as his living sacrifices, presenting our bodies as instruments of his righteousness.

ALL: Oh, most holy God, we agree today to be set apart for you. We choose you and you alone. We surrender to your will and your way. We determine to make this so, every remaining day of our lives.

LEADER: Let us pray.

[Each person in the group can take a turn praying, or one or two leaders can pray through these prayers. Make the prayers your own.]

- Pray a prayer of adoration, celebrating who God is.
- Pray a prayer of thanksgiving, thanking God for what He has done through Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Pray a prayer of commitment and surrender to him and him alone.
- Pray a prayer of glory, hallelujah, for all He has done, and all he will do in and through you in the days ahead.

LEADER: And now, let us take, together, the Lord's Supper.

READ: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. Take communion together. Ask someone to pray a prayer of blessing over your time of remembering all that Christ has done.

BLESSING

[Read Hebrews 13:20–21.] *Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Dismissal

UNIT 1: THE HOLY CLUB / SMALL GROUPS

The gospel, (that is, good tidings, good news for guilty, helpless sinners,) in the largest sense of the word, means, the whole revelation made to men by Jesus Christ; and sometimes the whole account of what our Lord did and suffered while he tabernacle among men...only beware thou do not deceive thy own soul with regard to the nature of this faith. It is not, as some have fondly conceived, a bare assent to the truth of the Bible, of the articles of our creed, or of all that is contained in the Old and New Testament...But it is, over and above this, a sure trust in the mercy of God, through Christ Jesus.

~ John Wesley: *Sermon 7, The Way to the Kingdom*

When John and Charles Wesley were at Oxford, they formed a “band of brothers” who were so serious about diving into the Word of God, allowing it to shape their lives, and living their lives in response to its Truth that they set themselves apart in what came to be known as the Holy Club. These young men started as a band of four, and grew eventually into leaders of the Methodist movement across the world, which has splintered and grown to incredible influence.

Charles Wesley founded the group, and John Wesley quickly became the spearhead leader. As the scholars at the Wesley Center Online have written, “The first work of the Holy Club was the study of the Bible. The new movement was spiritual, humanitarian, but, first and strongest of all, scriptural. The searching of the scriptures was earnest, open-minded, devout, unceasing.”²⁰³ Men of but one book.

²⁰³ <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesley-the-methodist/chapter-v-the-holy-club/>

This early formation of a small band of committed brothers might be one of the first modern models of small group ministry. In their early days they met weekly, and then a couple of times a week, and eventually they met each night. Their meetings included a time of prayer, studying from the Greek New Testament, reflecting on their day, examining their hearts and lives, and the sharing of communion. The holy club members also fasted together on Wednesdays and Fridays. In addition, they also shared of their belongings—making sure none in their group was lacking anything another brother had in excess.

In addition to the above habits, the Holy Club has been known for a high level of, or deep commitment to, interpersonal accountability. Here is a list of the following questions, which appear in the preface to John Wesley's second Oxford Diary. These questions, and the concept of true accountability undergirded the essence of the Holy Club.

Holy Club Questions²⁰⁴

- Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
- Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate?
- Do I confidentially pass on to others what has been said to me in confidence?
- Can I be trusted?
- Am I a slave to dress, friends, work or habits?

²⁰⁴ These questions originally appeared in the preface of Wesley's second Oxford diary. See: <http://hopefaithprayer.com/john-wesley-holy-club-questions>.

- Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?
- Did the Bible live in me today?
- Do I give the Bible time to speak to me every day?
- Am I enjoying prayer?
- When did I last speak to someone else of my faith?
- Do I pray about the money I spend?
- Do I get to bed on time and get up on time?
- Do I disobey God in anything?
- Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?
- Am I defeated in any part of my life?
- Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy or distrustful?
- How do I spend my spare time?
- Am I proud?
- Do I thank God that I am not as other people, especially as the Pharisees who despised the publican?
- Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold a resentment toward or disregard? If so, what am I doing about it?
- Do I grumble or complain constantly?
- Is Christ real to me?

These questions are intense. They are obviously not designed for the weak of heart, nor for those who are uncertain about following the ways of Jesus. A quick search for “Holy Club Questions” online will prove that this was never a definitive list;

the questions changed over time. The foundational significance of these questions comes from Hebrews 3:12–13. “See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called ‘Today,’ so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”

In this unit, each week, you will be given an opportunity to reflect on a few of these questions as a group. If a question is too specific or personal for the nature of your group, feel free to exchange it for another question, either from Wesley’s list, or from any other source you find to be helpful. The purpose of this exercise is not to force people into a corner, nor to coerce any given response. Rather, the routine in this unit is to give an opportunity to go deeper than perhaps you have before as a group, to experience grace in a space where oftentimes there is fear and manipulation. Take courage knowing that any step you take towards closer honesty with and love for one another is a great step indeed. Do not be ashamed, no matter how small a step it might be at first.

Week #1: Prayer

Almighty God unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known,
and from whom no Secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of thy holy spirit, that we may perfectly love thee,
and worthily magnify thy holy Name through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, 1662

Prayer is a broad term. Strictly speaking, prayer is conversation with God. But, it can look a lot of different ways. Every Christian, likely, has a preferred method of praying. This is not a bad thing unless we choose to stay in our area of comfort and never branch out to experience and learn a new way to encounter the grace of God in a fresh and dynamic way. For this unit, take some time to process the concept of prayer together, and then pray through the Lord's Prayer. Since it is the prayer the Lord himself taught us to pray, it seems a dynamic and acceptable place to start.

LEADER (ask): What does prayer look like for you? [Give time for the class to respond and discuss. You might want to make a list of the various ways people pray.]

LEADER (ask): Why do we pray? [Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

LEADER (ask): Have you ever been uncomfortable praying with others? Why do you think that is? Where might that stem from? [Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

READ: Matthew 6:5–8.

(ask): What does this passage say about prayer? What does this passage say about what and how we are to pray? [Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

(ask): What does Jesus prioritize in prayer? [Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

READ: Matthew 6:9–13.

Take time to process the Lord's Prayer, line by line:

(ask): OUR FATHER – What does it mean that God is ours?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

(ask): HOLY BE YOUR NAME – What does it mean for us to keep God's name holy?

What does it mean for you, or us, to honor God's holiness?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

(ask): KINGDOM – What do we need to do so that God's Kingdom can come into our

life, and rule, exactly as it is in heaven?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

(ask): DAILY BREAD – What are your needs today?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

What are our needs today, as a group?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

(ask): FORGIVENESS – Who do you need to forgive? We must take this seriously, for you have prayed that God would forgive you just as you have forgiven others. Who do you need to seek forgiveness from?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

(ask): TEMPTATION – What are the temptations you face in your life? Spend some time writing them down. Name them. Be specific. Reflect on them. Pray for power over them. Turn away from them in your heart.

[Give time for the class to write their responses. Then, give time and space for anyone who might want to respond. If appropriate, take time to discuss.]

(ask): DELIVERANCE – From what do you need to be delivered from? Ask God to meet you in that place. Rest assured knowing He is there with you.

[Give time for the class to write their responses. Then, give time and space for anyone who might want to respond. If appropriate, take time to discuss.]

(ask): GLORY – What does it look like in your life to bring Glory to God?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

Consider what you have to praise God for. What has he done in your life that He needs the glory for? His goodness? Loving kindness? Patience? Provisions? Spend time offering glory in your heart to God.

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss].

ALL: [Say the Lord's Prayer again, after the class has had the opportunity to process the Lord's Prayer, line-by-line.]

ALL (say): AMEN!

[Amen means "let it be." End your time committing to do what God has asked you to do. Reflect on his goodness, and surrender your right to control the outcome.]

LEADER: We are going to have a chance now to reflect on some of Wesley's holy club questions. Let us agree to fill this space with grace and understanding, that we might better know and love one another when we are done.

[Give space for people to share, but do not force anyone to do so; every person may be at a different place in their ability to engage true community. IF your group is not one that can be trusted—in other words, if there is a sense that someone might repeat, or manipulate any information that is given, then rather than share aloud, create space for each person to privately reflect upon these questions in lieu of sharing aloud].

1. Do I enjoy prayer?

2. Is Christ real to you/me/us?
3. Can I be trusted?
4. Do I pray about the money I spend?

READ: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.

[Take communion together. Ask someone to pray a prayer of blessing over your time of remembering all that Christ has done.]

BLESSING: [Read Hebrews 13:20–21.]

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Dismissal

Week #2: Scripture Study

[At the start of your time, **READ TOGETHER** The Nicene Creed]

*I believe in one God the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible;*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father,
by whom all things were made;
who for us and for our salvation came down from heaven,
and was incarnate by the Holy spirit of the virgin Mary,
and was made man,
and crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate;
He suffered and was buried,
and the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures,
and ascended into heaven,
and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;
and He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead;
whose kingdom shall have no end.*

*And I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and giver of life,
who proceedeth from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified;
who spoke by the prophets.*

*And I believe in one holy universal and apostolic church;
I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;
and I look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.*

Amen.

The task before us this week is to study scripture. The question at hand is: do you really believe what you claim you believe? This is a very important question. Sometimes we don't know what we really believe until it is tested and tried. Other times we may have a vague sense that we are generally in the right area, but clarity evades our thinking. We want to be sure, to rest on sound doctrine, to know that we know this truth; but sometimes, nagging questions and concerns distract us from the goal of pursuing truth. Next week we will be given an opportunity to reflect upon scripture, but this week our gift is that of study. We will do a lot of reading today. With the goal of renewing our mind in the basics of our faith.

LEADER (ask): What does studying scripture look like for you?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss. You might want to make a list of the various ways people study scripture.]

LEADER (ask): Why do we study scripture?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

Helpful information: The art of studying scripture *together* is quite a different task from studying scripture alone in ones prayer closet. Here are some tips which should help the group focus on the task at hand—letting God's word speak and allowing it to form the conversation.

1. Approach the Bible ready to learn. There is no point in doing this exercise if your focus is not on the Word of God. If needed, pray a quick prayer as you begin

asking God to teach you through his word, and help you focus your heart and mind on him.

2. Read the text aloud. Slowly. In various versions, if possible. If needed, read the passage multiple times. Let the text speak for itself rather than depending on outside opinion.
3. Expect the text itself to answer questions, rather than the leader. Again, you might want to say a quick prayer that God would illuminate what He wants to communicate. If questions are posed, do not neglect them, but allow the text to answer what it can, and if no answer is found, then lay that question to the side to consider at a later time.
4. Stay in the passage. Reading the passage multiple times often allows different words, phrases or imagery to come to the surface. Force your discussion to stay directly on the passage. Do not hesitate to look up other passages in scripture to answer questions, or to relate to the content of the text you are reading, BUT, do not allow tangents away from the particular passage at hand. Stay on topic.
5. Look for action verbs, nouns, and adjectives to get a good idea of the picture of the passage. If this story or passage is connected with another in scripture, then read the other as well and allow the texts to speak into the space of your group.
6. For further study, take any word that seems important and do a quick word study on it. Several biblical aids are available online which can help resource you for this task. Also, consult one or two Bible commentaries to help inform your conversation as a group.

7. Be prepared to see something new, hear something different, or wonder about something you might not have ever considered. Remember the Word of God is alive, and it is stronger than any double-edged sword. This practice will be difficult for many groups, but it is worth the effort to stay with it and do it together.

READ: Acts 2:14–36.

(ask): Peter is the main speaker in this passage, who is he and why is he making such a strong claim about Christ?

Read the passage again. [Some may want to read it in a new or different version.]

(ask): Who is Peter speaking to in this passage, and why is that significant?

Read the passage again. [Some may want to read it in a new or different version.]

(ask): Why was Peter so focused on David and in comparing/contrasting David and Jesus?

Read the passage again. [Some may want to read it in a new or different version.]

(ask): Focus on verse 36: What, do you think, is the difference between “Lord” and “Christ,” and why does Peter make such a significant distinction?

LEADER: We are going to have a chance now to reflect on some of Wesley's holy club questions. Let us agree to fill this space with grace, that we might better know and love one another when we are done.

[Give space for people to share, but do not force anyone to do so; every person may be at a different place in their ability to engage true community. IF your group is not one that can be trusted—in other words, if there is a sense that someone might repeat, or manipulate any information that is given, then rather than share aloud, create space for each person to privately reflect upon these questions in lieu of sharing aloud].

1. Does the Bible live in me today?
2. Do I give the Bible time to speak to me every day?
3. When was the last time I spoke to someone about my faith?
4. Am I proud?

READ: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

[Take communion together. Ask someone to pray a prayer of blessing over your time of remembering all that Christ has done.]

BLESSING: [Read Hebrews 13:20-21.]

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you

with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Dismissal

Week #3: Scripture Meditation

We do not always realize what a radical suggestion it is for us
to read to be formed and transformed rather than
to gather information. We are information seekers.

We love to cover territory. – Macrina Wiederkehr (in Thompson, *Soul Feast*)

Last week we had the privilege of studying a passage of scripture together. This week we have the privilege of meditating on the Word of God. Meditation is a high-velocity word; it packs a punch. For some, it can even be a scary word. But, Wesley used the phrase, and so, it is not a term that should deeply concern us. Wesley wrote, “...under the general term of searching the Scriptures, both hearing, reading, and meditating are contained.”

Meditating on scripture is a different practice than *studying* scripture. These two practices are closely aligned, but meditating infers reflection. Rather than being in a hurry to move from point A to point B, the reader allows for the journey from point A to point B to speak. In meditation there is no hurry. The objective is not information, it is transformation. The Apostle Paul also speaks of this in Romans 12:1–2. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but *be transformed by the renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Being transformed by the renewing of your mind, is a sweet invitation indeed. Today, you are gifted with an opportunity to reflect on a familiar passage of scripture. The point of the exercise today is not to remember what you have been taught, nor reinforce what you think you already believe. Rather, it is an opportunity to open your heart and mind up to the Holy Spirit and allow Truth to pierce your heart.

LEADER (ask): Have you ever sat with a passage of scripture for a surprisingly long time? Tell of your experience.

[Allow time and space for various answers.]

LEADER (ask): What is the difference between studying scripture, and meditating on scripture?

[Allow time and space for various answers.]

READ: 1 Corinthians 13.

[If time allows, read the chapter in at least 3 different versions.]

(ask): What do you notice that might be a new thought?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

(ask): What one word or phrase seems to pop out at you today? It might be different from any other time you've read this passage.

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

(ask): What does the Lord seem to be saying to you? Is there an invitation for you in this passage? Something to change? Something to start doing? Something to stop doing? An attitude adjustment that needs to be made?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

(ask): What would it look like this week for you to live love with your spouse, co-workers, children, neighbors, and enemies with patience, kindness, and gentleness?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

LEADER: We are going to have a chance now to reflect on some of Wesley's holy club questions. Let us agree to fill this space with grace that we might better know and love one another when we are done.

[Give space for people to share, but do not force anyone to do so; every person may be at a different place in their ability to engage true community. IF your group is not one that can be trusted—in other words, if there is a sense that someone might repeat, or

manipulate any information that is given, then rather than share aloud, create space for each person to privately reflect upon these questions in lieu of sharing aloud.]

1. Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
2. Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?
3. Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy or distrustful?
4. How do I spend my spare time?

READ: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. [Take communion together. Ask someone to pray a prayer of blessing over your time of remembering all that Christ has done.]

BLESSING: [Read Hebrews 13:20–21.]

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Dismissal

Week #4: Acts of Mercy

Acts of Mercy are powerful opportunities not only to encounter grace, but to also bestow it. These are ways we extend God's love to others who are in spiritual, physical, and material need. The age-old adage is really true, it is much better to give than receive. However, because each context is unique, and because some things can only work during certain seasons of life, the following are suggestions for your group to choose from.

Acts of Mercy invite you to learn to give selflessly. These are activities Wesley understood to be prudential (sensible, wise, and helpful). Reaching beyond ourselves into the lives of others is always a sacrifice worth pursuing. May the grace and kindness of our Savior strengthen you and embolden you to reach outside of your group into the lives of others who have a need. In so doing, may you encounter a sustaining and redeeming grace that both surprises and encourages you towards wholeness in Christ.

[NOTE: Most of these will require advanced planning. If you are not meeting at your weekly spot, or if you are meeting at a different time, **BE SURE TO CLEARLY COMMUNICATE** with all involved. Also, please be sure to get needed permission for any work you might do in the community, there are always legal implications—even for acts of service. If you are planning to visit a home or a business, please call ahead and schedule the appointment. Out of respect, plan to arrive and leave on time. Many of these activities will require additional planning. Perhaps your group could take one week to brainstorm and organize all of the Acts of Mercy activities your group will choose to do so that they can be planned appropriately. Also, think creatively beyond what is listed here. What ways can you bless others and meet their needs? This is the heartbeat of

Wesley's Acts of Mercy. Find things to do as a group, and spend time together, perhaps during the "Reflect and Remember" week to process together what you have done, and how it impacted the people in your group. Serving others creates ripe space to grow personally. Do not overlook the invitation to engage these as creatively as possible for your group and your context.]

- **Visiting the sick:** Perhaps your group could, instead of meeting at your normal meeting spot, visit with an elderly member of your congregation who is no longer able to physically get to church. Choose to "bring church" to him or her instead. (Be careful of dietary restrictions if you bring snacks or food). As a group, visit with your friend, pray for your friend, and take communion together during your normal small group meeting time.
- **Doing good:** Spend time making a list of things that need to be done around your immediate community. Is there a small project your church building and facilities could benefit from your group doing? Is there something in the community that might help encourage others? For instance, during the fall you could choose a neighborhood and help rake leaves. If it is springtime, perhaps you could help pull weeds for someone in your neighborhood, or at a community location. There may be painting or planting, or small labor jobs to be done to bless a community resource. Think creatively. What practical needs might you set aside an hour of your week to help meet? Picking up trash? Painting over graffiti? Fixing something that is broken on a building nearby?

- **Visiting those in prison:** Take an hour and visit your local jail. Or, homeless shelter. Or, battered women and children's center. There are many types of prisons—some people find themselves imprisoned because of their personal choices, and some people are “locked up” because of the choices of others. One creative idea would be to contact a local hospital and ask if there are any drug babies who need to be held. Spending time holding a screaming baby is a demanding and stressful hour, which can offer much grace and mercy to a vulnerable life who needs it the most—a life in a prison not of their own choosing. Find a local hospital and see if there are any drug babies who need comfort, or new moms who need encouragement.
- **Feeding the hungry:** Traditional options would include serving at a local food pantry or homeless shelter. Creative options might include offering a free meal for your congregation prior to worship, organizing supplies in your church food pantry, or in the community shelter. Take prepared meals to those places where homeless are gathered and give them out. (Consider setting aside additional time if you choose this option, and share the meal with those you are serving. Use the opportunity to connect with the person behind the need. Learn their names. Listen to their stories.) Or, drive around and offer bottles of water to those panhandling for handouts at intersections and on freeway off-ramps. DO NOT pass out money, but find creative ways to meet needs and offer a kind word of hope to others—and do not go by yourself; be sure to stay as a group, or go out in small groups of three to five.

- **Giving generously to the needs of others:** Perhaps there is some other need in your congregation, or throughout your community. Spend time brainstorming a plan to help start meeting that need. Raising funds? Giving of your time, energy and talents? Raising awareness? Setting in motion a commitment to get your congregation involved in addressing the issue? How can you as a group seek justice for this need? How can you as a group work to end oppression in this issue?

Again, these are just ideas. The object of this exercise is to set aside time, as a group, on a regular basis to think beyond your own needs. What are the needs of others, and how can you help meet those needs? There are various ways the Wesley brothers and their followers participated in acts of mercy. There is no “wrong way” to do so—except to neglect to do so. One last word of direction. For some in your group, this might be an exciting adventure which is a significant priority. For others, this might be the very first time they are being challenged to see beyond their own needs. As a group, do your best to offer space to people anywhere on the spectrum. Some will jump at the chance to get out and serve, others will scoff at a routine opportunity to engage social justice issues. Remember, Wesleyans engage in Acts of Mercy as a means of participating in God’s love for those in need.

We are called to love God, and one of the best ways we do so is to love others authentically. We serve out of obedience to our Holy God, and out of his love for others when we can’t find the motive within our own selves. Remember also, these Acts of Mercy are means of grace; they are means that God has established for our own growth in

holiness (in formative holiness, if you will). Basically, if we are to grow in Christlikeness, which God intends, we do so by engaging ourselves in bestowing God's mercy and grace to others. This is what God has asked of us, and this is what we are invited to do here.

Conclude your time together honoring the Lord's Supper. (Perhaps, if appropriate, you could offer to do so with those you have chosen to serve this week).

READ 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.

[Take communion together. Ask someone to pray a prayer of blessing over your time of remembering all that Christ has done.]

BLESSING – [Read Hebrews 13:20–21.]

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Dismissal

Week #5: Reflect & Remember

We've come to the end of our first unit. During these past weeks we have reviewed the significance of being in a committed community, the importance of our true beliefs, and our need to live lovingly. These are all significant Wesleyan precepts.

We were also given the opportunity each week to take communion together. For some of us, doing communion each week has been a stretch. For others it has been a gift. Some of us have looked forward to Wesley's "Holy Club Questions" with excitement, ready to share. Others of us have looked forward to those same questions with fear and trepidation. We are all in a different place. The purpose of this week is to reflect upon what has been meaningful, significant, or stretching for us. As we share our experiences with one another, may we remember what God has done for us. Has God given you a word of encouragement? Share it. Has God strengthened you? Remember that. Has He delivered, challenged, or changed you in some way? Honor that by sharing it with others. Testimony is a powerful tool. We are called to remember, and not forget so that we can honor and not forsake the One who is worthy of all our praises. This week, you are invited to remember, together, for the sake of the glory of God.

LEADER (ask): What has been the most exciting thing for you that we have done, or talked about, these past few weeks?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

LEADER (ask): What has been the most challenging thing for you that we have done, or talked about these past few weeks?

[Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

LEADER (ask): What would it look like to take a few moments to celebrate together what God has done? [Give time for the class to respond and discuss.]

[Lead the group in a time of prayer.]

READ: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.

[Take communion together. Ask someone to pray a prayer of blessing over your time of remembering all that Christ has done.]

BLESSING: [Read Hebrews 13:20–21.]

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Dismissal

UNIT 2: GRACE

The grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is FREE IN ALL, and FREE FOR ALL...It is free in all to whom it is given. It does not depend on any power or merit in man; no, not in any degree, neither in whole, nor in part. It does not in anywise depend either on the good works or righteousness of the receiver; not on anything he has done, or anything he is. It does not depend on his endeavors. It does not depend on his good tempers, or good desires, or good purposes and intentions; for all those flow from the free grace of God; they are the streams only, not the fountain. They are the fruits of free grace, and not the root. They are not the cause, but the effects of it. Whatsoever good is in man, or is done by man, God is the author and doer of it. Thus is his grace free in all; that is no way depending on any power or merit in man, but on God alone, who freely gave us his own Son, and with him freely giveth us all things.”

~ John Wesley, Sermon 128, *Free Grace*

For Wesley, everything rises and falls on the grace, and the goodness of God.

Week #1: Prayer

Week #2: Scripture Study

Week #3: Scripture Meditation

Week #4: Acts of Mercy

Week #5: Reflect & Remember

UNIT 3: THE BODY OF CHRIST

Weeks: 8-12; Week 13 BREAK

“How much do we almost continually hear about the Church! With many it is matter of daily conversation. And yet how few understand what they talk of! How few know what the term means! A more ambiguous word than this, the Church, is scarce to be found in the English language. It is sometimes taken for a building, set apart for public worship: sometimes for a congregation, or body of people, united together in the service of God...It may be taken indifferently for any number of people, how small or great soever. As, ‘where two or three are met together in his name,’ there is Christ; so (to speak with St. Cyprian,) ‘where two or three believers are met together there is a Church.’ Thus it is that St. Paul, writing to Philemon, mentions ‘the Church which is the house,’ plainly signifying that even a Christian family may be termed a Church.”

~Wesley, *Of the Church*

Week #1: Prayer

Week #2: Scripture Study

Week #3: Scripture Meditation

Week #4: Acts of Mercy

Week #5: Reflect & Remember

UNIT 4: ENGAGING THE WORLD

Weeks: 14-18; Week 19 BREAK

But what kind of love is that whereof the Apostle is speaking throughout [1 Corinthians Chapter 13]. Many persons of eminent learning and piety apprehend that it is the love of God. But from reading the whole chapter numberless times, and considering it in every light, I am thoroughly persuaded that what St. Paul is here directly speaking of is the love of our neighbor. I believe whoever carefully weighs the whole tenor of his discourse will be fully convinced of this. But it must be allowed to be such a love of our neighbor, as can only spring from the love of God. And whence does this love of God flow only from that faith which is of the operation of God; which whoever has, has a direct evidence that, ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.’ When this is particularly applied to his heart, so that he can say with humble boldness, ‘This life which I now live, I live by the faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me,’ then, and not till then, ‘the love of God is shed abroad in his heart.’ And this love sweetly constrains him to love every child of man with the love which is here spoken of; not with a love of esteem or of commonplence; for this can have no place with regard to those who are (if not his personal enemies, yet) enemies to God and their own soul; but with a love of benevolence—of tender goodwill to all the souls that God has made.”

~John Wesley, Sermon 91: On Charity

Week #1: Prayer

Week #2: Scripture Study

Week #3: Scripture Meditation

Week #4: Acts of Mercy

Week #5: Reflect & Remember

UNIT 5: FAMILY RELIGION / HOME LIFE

Weeks: 20-24; Week 25 BREAK

On the contrary, what will the consequence be, if they do not adopt this resolution – if family religion be neglected – if care not be taken of the rising generation, will not the present revival of religion in a short time die away? Will it not be as the historian speaks of the Roman state in its infancy—*res unis aetatis* – ‘an event that has its beginning and end within the space of one generation.’ Will it not be a confirmation of that melancholy remark of Luther’s, that ‘a revival of religion never lasts longer than one generation.’...On the Lord’s day in particular, you should so forecast what is necessary to be done at home, that they [your family] may have an opportunity of attending all the ordinances of God. Yea, and you should take care that they have some time every day for reading, meditation, and prayer; and you should inquire whether they do actually employ that time in the exercises for which it is allowed. Neither should any day pass without family prayer, seriously and solemnly performed.”

~ John Wesley, Sermon 94: *On Family Religion*

Week #1: Prayer

Week #2: Scripture Study

Week #3: Scripture Meditation

Week #4: Acts of Mercy

Week #5: Reflect & Remember

UNIT 6: STEWARDSHIP

Weeks: 26-30; Week 31 BREAK

If there are any vices which are not natural to man, I should imagine [those that delight in money; those that take pleasure in it; those that seek their happiness therein; that brood over their gold and silver, bills or bonds] is one. AS money of itself does not seem to gratify any natural desire or appetite of the human mind...there is [also] a more refined species of covetousness, mentioned by the great Apostle, Pleonexia, which literally means a desire of having more; more than we have already. And those also come under the denomination of ‘they that will be rich.’ It is true that this desire, under proper restrictions, is innocent; nay, commendable. But when it exceeds the bounds (and how difficult is it not to exceed them!) then it comes under the present censure.

~ John Wesley, Sermon 87: *The Danger of Riches*

Week #1: Prayer

Week #2: Scripture Study

Week #3: Scripture Meditation

Week #4: Acts of Mercy

Week #5: Reflect & Remember

UNIT 7: SOCIAL JUSTICE

Weeks: 32-36; Week 37 BREAK

The nature of religion is so far from consisting in these – in forms of worship, or rites and ceremonies – that it does not properly consist in any outward actions, of what kind so ever. It is true, a man cannot have any religion who is guilty of vicious, immoral actions; or who does to others what he would not they should do to him, if he were in the same circumstance. And it is also true, that he can have no real religion who ‘knows to do good, and doth it not.’ Yet may a man both abstain from outward evil, and do good, and still have no religion. Yea, two persons may do the same outward work; suppose, feeding the hungry, or clothing the naked; and, in the meantime one may act from the love of God, and the other from the love of praise. So manifest is it, that although true religion naturally leads to every good word and work, yet the real nature thereof lies deeper still, even in ‘the hidden man of the heart.’

~ John Wesley, Sermon 7: *The Way to The Kingdom*

Week #1: Prayer

Week #2: Scripture Study

Week #3: Scripture Meditation

Week #4: Acts of Mercy

Week #5: Reflect & Remember

UNIT 8: HOLINESS OF HEART & LIFE

Weeks: 38-42; Week 43 BREAK

All the Liturgy of the Church is full of petitions for that holiness without which, the Scripture everywhere declares, no man shall see the Lord. And these are all summed up in those comprehensive words which we are supposed to be so frequently repeating: ‘Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name.’ It is evident that in the last clause of this petition, all outward holiness is contained: Neither can it be carried to a greater height, or expressed in stronger terms. And those words, ‘Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts,’ contain the negative branch of inward holiness; the height and depth of which is purity of heart, by the inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit. The remaining words, ‘that we may perfectly love thee,’ contain the positive part of holiness; seeing this love, which is the fulfilling of the law, implies the whole mind that was in Christ.”

~ John Wesley: Sermon 134, *True Christianity*

Week #1: Prayer

Week #2: Scripture Study

Week #3: Scripture Meditation

Week #4: Acts of Mercy

Week #5: Reflect & Remember

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