

STEERING LIFE AND MINISTRY IN WESLEYAN¹ DIRECTIONS

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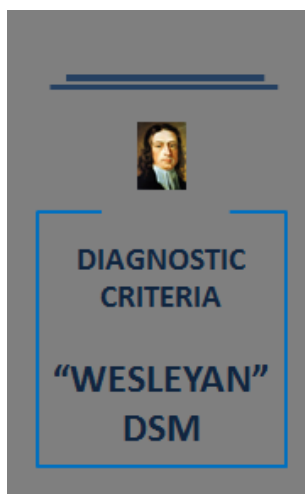
Will you join me in praying a prayer of John Wesley²?

"O that we may all receive of Christ's fullness, grace upon grace; grace to pardon our sins, and subdue our iniquities; to justify our persons and to sanctify our souls; and to complete that holy change, that renewal of our hearts, whereby we may be transformed into that blessed image wherein thou didst create us."



One of the things you learn in the psychotherapeutic world of hospital chaplaincy is that extreme care has to be used with words that "define" people. One time a few years ago, a friend who was working with a new care team commented about the patient's fear of staff and used the word "paranoid." The rest of the team insisted that the patient was NOT paranoid. My friend didn't push-back, but asked me about it. When we discussed it, early on I pulled down my copy of DSM IV (the diagnostic and statistical manual that psychotherapists and the like use) and turned to "Paranoid Personality Disorder." There we read that if four or more of seven clear criteria were present, then a person can properly be described as "Paranoid." But only one criteria fit – and then only partly.

We had been reminded that a clinical team would only label a person "paranoid" if specific diagnostic criteria applied. In such professional settings, the same could be said for a word like "depressed," and for many other assessments.



Now why on earth am I talking with you about "Diagnostic Criteria"? Because I have been asked to lay out – in *this* professional setting – "diagnostic criteria" for what it means think and to live so that one can properly be identified as "Wesleyan".

Now, does anyone see the problem I have with an assignment to present Wesleyan distinctives – even though it comes from my Bishop and National Leadership Team? It's that John Wesley would roll over in his grave and shout, "What do you mean – distinctives?! I don't *want* you to have 'distinctives'!"

In his "The Character of a Methodist," he makes it clear that the distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not doctrines or practices, though orthodoxy and orthopraxy are assumed.³

Orthodoxy (right doctrine) – is assumed but is not the distinguishing mark
Orthopraxy (right practice) – is assumed but is not the distinguishing mark

In fact, he makes his case through a very powerful use of words. I may be projecting, but I feel some sarcasm in his words. Wesley continues,⁴

"What then is the mark? . . . I answer: A Methodist is one who has 'the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost . . .'; one who 'loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength.'"

In his sermon, "The Way to the Kingdom," Wesley presses this point, saying that you can believe all the creeds and have impeccable theology and still be as great a stranger to the religion of the heart as the devil is.⁵ He continues by referring to Paul's words in Rom. 14 about the inner life, the "heart" (the essential "*person*"), where "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" take up lodging.

So the only "distinctive" Wesley was really interested in is

Orthokardia (right "heart" = right "person") – **THE** distinguishing mark

You ,may know that some people use the word "orthopathy" here, and I won't take time to lay out the arguments for both good terms.

Thus, the first Wesleyan distinctive is the lack of the kind of "distinctive" that religious people normally think of! So if John Wesley were to ask people new to your church what it's like, he would NOT want to hear, "Oh! Unlike most other Christians, *they* believe in..... or *they* do things *this way*...." No! He would want to hear about a pervasive Christ-like *heart* for God and for neighbour; he would want to hear about people who are using the Means of Grace that all serious Christians employ to become more like Jesus! This may be the most important thing I say tonight:

The key Wesleyan distinctive is Wesley's desire not to be distinctive in anything except "heart" (whole person) for Jesus and for people Christianity, that beautiful reality that is true of Christ-followers at their best in any place and at any time!

So our "Wesleyan" identity is not that "we are not Calvinists" or "not whatever it is *you* don't like!" With Calvinists and so many other Christians, *we agree* on most things about the human predicament and God's great plan of salvation!⁶

I hope you find that refreshing! Nothing in God's mission for Wesleyans is to show the world how *different* we are from other serious Christians! Nothing!!

Now someone will say, “But there *still* must be some indicators of what ‘family’ of Christians we’re in! . . . Plus, our Bishop and National Leadership Team have told you there are!”

Well, actually I think there *are* some basic indicators, and it’s no surprise. God seems to have made humans so that we usually function best in identifiable units – families, other groupings. We *do* need some commonalities (though not too many!).

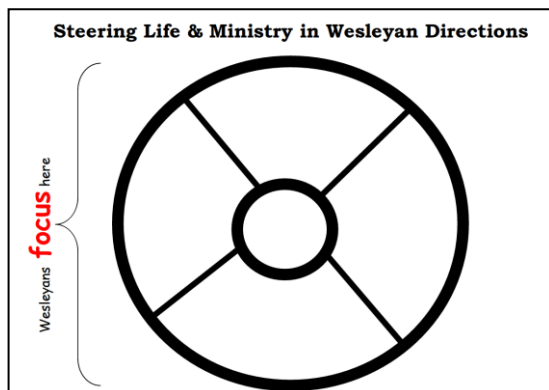
Let me now explain how I tried to comply with the Bishop’s request. Wesley says we have no distinctives and Elford says show me the distinctives! So I read and read and read in Wesley and in people who know a lot about Wesley. I also thought about how to communicate what I was finding – and how to emphasize what Wesley did – as opposed to what *we* might be inclined to stress. I also thought about the diversity of our team, and different learning styles we have.



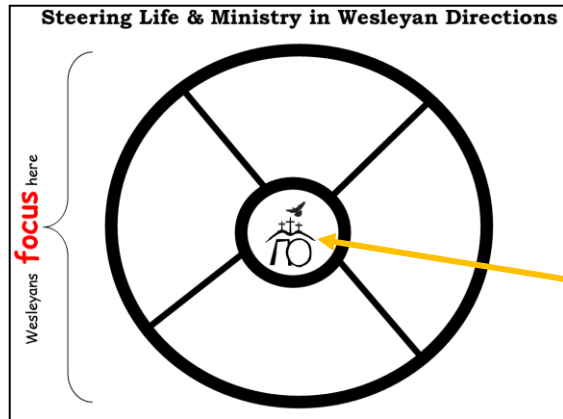
So this Croatian farm boy, for whom the yearly highlight 50 years ago was being able to drive a better tractor at threshing time (because the other farmers had more auspicious tractors than we did), this boy pondered and pondered.



You also need to know that back then I thought I had died and gone to heaven when I could drive a mighty Farmall H. Here is what it felt like as a young boy!

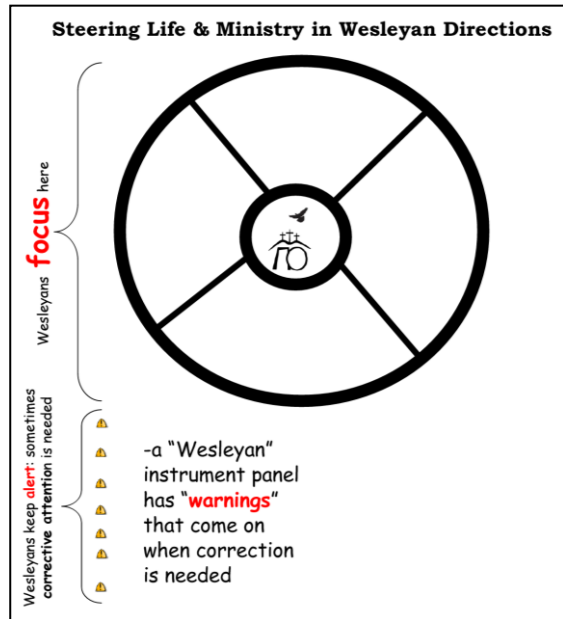


So a steering wheel model for the three or four most important things, the things we have to keep our **focus** on all the time, arose.

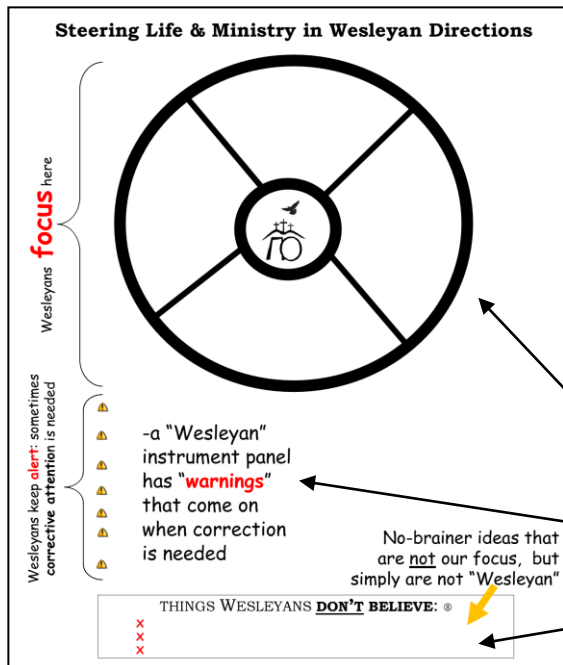


Of course, it seemed obvious from the start that a Wesleyan would make it clear that Christ's life, death, resurrection and living presence through the Holy Spirit are at the heart of our theology and practice.

So: (That's an empty tomb in front of three crosses, and a dove representing the Spirit.)



Then I reflected on the fact that there *are* other important matters – things we ought to be alert to if something was going wrong in that area, and I thought about warning lights and gauges. So my model grew:



And then I realized that there are some "no-brainers" (family convictions) that should probably be mentioned. Wesley has insisted that these understandings are nowhere near the heart of what it means to be Wesleyan, but they are part of the way the Wesleyans think that are different from other Christian families. So the model has an additional part at the bottom.

Does that make sense?

- Keep your focus here +
- know that these areas sometimes need corrective attention, +
- don't forget what family you're in.

Now where do we start in laying out a Wesleyan “Diagnostic Criteria”?

In my work, it is important to find out what a person’s deity is like, for when you do, you already know important things about them! Here I join many Wesleyan scholars in arguing that at the heart of Wesleyan thinking and living is this:

GOD IS LOVE.

Someone might yawn and say, “That’s no big deal. Don’t we just *assume* that?” Well, my experience is that God comes across *quite differently* in different Christian contexts. For Wesleyans, while God exercises *many* functions (including judge), the most accurate and faithful thing that can be said is “God is love.”

Some of you are old enough to remember the joy of encountering the *Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*⁷ through which Mildred Wynkoop, a Nazarene minister and scholar called Wesleyans in 1972 to rethink many of the ways we articulated Wesley’s theology. She called for a refocusing on love and relationship, for a re-thinking of how we saw sin as a “substance” to be “eradicated,” and more.

Wesley was much aware of other views of God in the Christian world around him, He writes⁸:

(the doctrine of predestination [as taught by some Calvinists]) destroys all [God’s] attributes at once. It overturns both his justice, mercy and truth. Yea, it represents the most Holy God as worse than the devil. ... But you say you will “prove it by Scripture.” Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves, it never can prove this. ... There are many Scriptures the true sense whereof neither you or I shall know till death is swallowed up in victory. But this I know, better it were to say it had no sense at all than to say it had such a sense as this. ... No Scripture can mean that God is not love, or that his mercy is not over all his works.

Whereas “high” Calvinists ask, “**How does a Sovereign God love?**”⁹ Wesleyans ask, “**How does this loving God express his sovereignty?**” There is a *huge* difference between those two questions!¹⁰



So the first thing in our Wesleyan model is simply this: “**God is love.**”

And our question for reflection – whether we are thinking about our next sermon or our family budget – is:

☛ How does **our view of God** (seen most clearly in Jesus Christ) speak to “this”?

Or “What picture of God is presupposed in doing or not doing this?”

* * * *

That’s where it starts! Now, where do we go next? I don’t think anyone with knowledge of the Wesleyan tradition will disagree with the word

GRACE.

Wesleyans focus on the grace of this loving God. One reason grace is central is that Wesleyans see the human predicament accurately: we humans *are* fearfully and wonderfully made ***and*** at the same time, to use Victor Shepherd’s words, “there is no human undertaking that isn’t fallen, sin-riddled, corrupted . . . there is no *aspect* of the human being (reason, will, affect) that is unaffected and by which we can restore ourselves.”¹¹ So we ***need GRACE!***¹²

But let’s not *assume* we know what grace is, or how Wesley sees it. He tells us in his sermon, “The Witness of Our Own Spirit.” Here is a Kinghorn rendering in modern English:¹³

The phrase *the grace of God* is sometimes understood as that **freely given love and unmerited mercy** by which sinners, through the merits of Christ, are reconciled to God. However, in this instance [Paul in 2 Corinthians] “the grace of God” means **God’s power through the Holy Spirit** “at work in us, enabling us to will and to work for his good pleasure.” As soon as the grace of God in his pardoning love is manifested to our souls, the grace of God in the power of his Spirit begins his work within our lives.

For Wesley, grace has two dimensions. It goes far beyond “pardoning love” to “the power of the Spirit to transform our lives”! As one of my favourite authors¹⁴ says in a book that just came out, salvation is so much more than just a contract of acquittal that is signed by praying a sinner’s prayer or some such thing!

Of course, other theological traditions speak of grace too! For some it is one of their key words, often connected with “Sovereign.” However, for Wesley and Wesleyans, divine grace is ***cooperative***. Like the Eastern Fathers from whom he learned, Wesley understands divine grace as ***an invitation into partnership***.¹⁵ Do you see the distinctive “grain” that is starting to appear in the texture of Wesleyanism?

Now, most of you have studied Wesleyan theology. For that reason I will outline the high points in the salvation story of how God’s grace works in

broken people. There are several variants in the models used. This is Wesley's model in his sermon, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation." The list can be tinkered with, but for our purposes tonight this will work fine.¹⁶

preventing grace;
convincing grace, usually in Scripture termed *repentance*;
justification
sanctification.

Let me say one personal thing about how **prevenient grace** matters to me in the past 14 years. Believing in prevenient grace is crucial to my being able to work as a professional chaplain in a publicly-funded, multi-faith institution in a pluralist society. If I believed that God did not start working in people's lives until they have heard and grasped the Christian gospel, I could not function as a hospital chaplain in such a place. But since I believe that God is already at work, already preventing full destruction by sin, and already creating hungers for himself (not irresistibly, of course), I can serve with integrity in a hospital where most of the patients are not "religious" – and many lack even a Christian "memory." For with every patient I see, I know that this loving God has already been there, helping them in many ways, and prompting longings for more wholeness. This will be true even if we never speak words about the divine!

Prevenient Grace draws us toward what Wesley calls "**convincing (or convicting) grace**," which, as Tom Oden says, "begins not with our self-initiated determination to repent but by the grace that *elicits* a determination to repent."¹⁷

Prevenient grace brings us to the point of attentiveness to one's own sinfulness . . .
 Convicting grace enables one to grow toward repentance, toward greater knowledge of oneself as sinner, aware of how far away from God one is.

Then we come to the pair, **Justifying Grace** and **Sanctifying Grace**. Much more about both will be shared at this Conference.



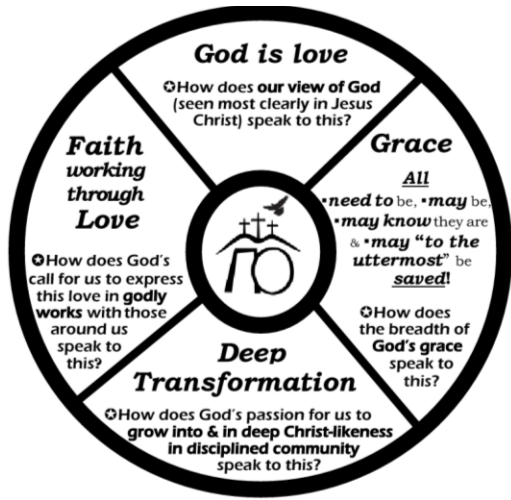
So, the second great, always-in-focus theme is **Grace! Grace upon Grace!**

“So what?” What if we were to ask, when considering important alternatives,

☛ How does the immensity of God’s grace speak to “this”?

* * * *

As we move to the third key emphasis in a “Wesleyan” approach, I need to tell you how I changed my plans for this talk.



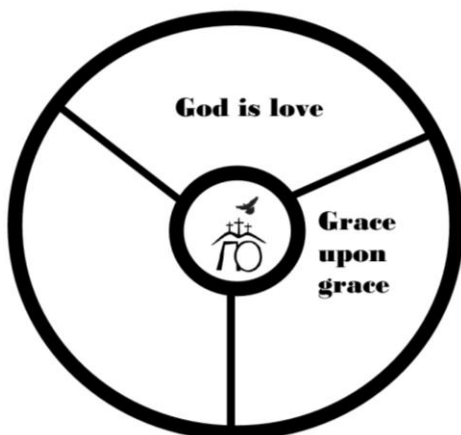
Earlier this summer, I saw the data calling for a four-part model (with # 3 being “Deep Transformation” or “sanctification” or “holiness” or “Christian Perfection” and # 4 being “faith working through love” – into which I was going to put all the “missional” and “serving” things.

But I began to see a problem. I soon saw that I had separated out “Faith working through Love” as though it were something *distinct from* or *added onto* the deep transformation into Christ-likeness (“holiness”) that Wesley saw the Bible calling for.

I started wondering; Have others of us slipped at times into thinking that the cultivation of holiness of heart and life is *primarily* or *exclusively* a matter of me and Jesus, or me and the Holy Spirit, or me and the other people in my small group – something that happens in personal prayer or in a discipleship group?

But the more I read Wesley, the more I sensed that I had misunderstood him (and the Bible). For one thing, “faith working through love,” my early title for part 4, is one of his favourite descriptions of sanctification!¹⁸

Here we need to understand Wesley’s teaching on the **Means of Grace - works of mercy** and **works of piety**. This is the second key thing I want to share with you tonight. Works of mercy are not “separate” things from the life of growing Christ-likeness in disciplined community by the Spirit. They are **part** of it! Actually, they are **integral** to it. More in a moment.



So late in August I scrapped the 4 part model (which separated the inseparable). Now it has 3 parts. Wesley (and Jesus and Paul and James) all insist that transforming love works “in here” **and** “out there” touching people!

Listen to Wesley himself in his *General Rules*:¹⁹

By *salvation* [the Methodist] means holiness of heart and life. ... a Methodist is one who has “the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given to him”; one who “loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength.” ... [and] this commandment is written in his heart, that “he who loveth God, loves his brother also.” ... His obedience is in proportion to his love, the source from whence it flows. And therefore, loving God with all his heart, he serves him with all his strength. ... Lastly, as he has time, he “does good unto all men”—unto neighbours, and strangers, friends, and enemies. And that in every possible kind; not only to their bodies, by “feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick or in prison,” but much more does he labour to do good to their souls.

Under this third great focus of Wesleyans I will touch on several things.

- **Healing** (a therapeutic approach)
- **The Holy Spirit**
- **Love**
- **Disciplined Community**
- **Means of Grace**
- **Works of Piety**
- **Works of Mercy**

Healing

Whereas many Western Christians have seen salvation primarily in terms of who is “in” and who is “out,” or “guilty” vs “forgiven,” “heaven” or “hell,” Wesley’s theology, while including the “juridical” element which is present in the New Testament, is more Eastern, with a greater sense of God’s therapeutic, healing, transforming work in marred, distorted human nature.²⁰ Our own Howard Snyder says:²¹

Reformed theology has tended to use primarily (or exclusively) juridical models of salvation, with strong emphasis on the Book of Romans. Jesus’ atonement cancels the penalty for sin so that we may be forgiven, justified. Wesley affirmed this, of course. But for Wesley the deeper issue was the moral disease of sin that needed healing by God’s grace.

If you are a “Wesleyan,” you see the whole salvation process much more as a long journey of healing and restoring rather than “just getting people in.”

The Holy Spirit (my model reads, “**actualized by the Spirit**”) We’ve already seen how Wesley understands grace as involving the active, powerful work of the Spirit. Here is a Maddox summary:²²

The Wesley brothers focused more attention on the work of the Holy Spirit than was common in their Anglican setting. It began with stress on the assurance of God's pardoning love, or the "witness of the Spirit," which evokes and empowers a believer's responsive love for God and neighbor. They then emphasized how this "new birth" makes possible the journey of sanctification, or growth in the "fruit of the Spirit." Add to this John's concern in particular to reclaim (within the Western tradition) the "gifts of the Spirit," like the gift of preaching, for lay men and women.

"Wesleyans," while clearly Christ-focused, have a vibrant awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Which brings us to **Love**. Here is Ken Kinghorn's beautiful statement in the preface to his modern English transcription of Wesley's *Plain Account*:²³

According to John Wesley, the core of holiness is *love*. He states in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, "It were well you should be thoroughly sensible of this—'the heaven of heavens is love.' There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way. . . if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them upon a false scent. Settle it then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth of the Corinthians. You can go no higher than this." John Wesley also believed that Christians ought to aim no lower than this.

Sadly, here is where we often stop – with words, sentiments about love. But something else is required, and Wesley knew it so much better than almost everyone in Church history: **Disciplined Community**.

Friends, I know that some of us hear the word "discipline" and cringe – either because we want comfort or because we've seen it attempted in abusive, unChristlike ways. Disciplined community is one of the hardest things to do well. It's one of those realities that no brittle formula will create. It's a miracle of relationship and discernment – clearly it is a miracle of the Spirit!

Let's start here. "Wesley believed that Christians grow in grace when they *watch over one another*, when they hold each other accountable for doing the things that help them receive God's grace and for not doing the things that cause them to move away from God."²⁴

I've already suggested how hard this is in our day, but I have seen it done well too. After being clear that he is not trying to get us to do it exactly as Wesley did, Howard Snyder insists that we **do** need²⁵

. . . something more than merely fellowship, study or prayer groups. The Methodist system shows the need for covenant, discipline and accountability within the group, and accountability of the group to the larger church body.

Why? Because even though the Bible does not specifically prescribe such groups, a level of Christian life and action **is** prescribed which never materializes without some kind of intentional small group structure.²⁶

If **God is love** and **grace upon grace** are ever going to make their way **into life**, and if they are ever to **touch a broken world**, a Wesleyan group life of disciplined community is required. I can't think of anything more crucial today in our becoming more truly "Wesleyan" (and "Biblical") than the development of healthy units of disciplined community!

Here is where we need to talk about the **"Means of Grace"**. This is the list on the Weyburn website²⁷

<u>WORKS OF PIETY</u> (Loving God)	<u>WORKS OF MERCY</u> (Loving Neighbours)
Prayer	Feed the Hungry, Clothe the Naked
The Lord's Supper	Welcome Strangers
Scripture	Visit the Sick, Visit Prisoners
Worship	Instruct, Comfort, Encourage
Fasting	Save Souls from Death
Christian Conference	

In this regard, we need to remember an important Wesleyan nuance! Maddox observes that Wesley's early sermons were primarily reminders of the **duty** to live like Christ.²⁸ But over time, Wesley becomes more and more convinced that the Christian life is one of **responsiveness to God's gracious initiative**. This is another key "pattern" in a Wesleyan fabric! Wesley explains this in "The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God"²⁹

The life of God in the soul . . . is God's breathing into the soul, and the soul's breathing back what it first receives from God. This exchange is a continual action of God upon the believers' souls and a response of the believers' souls to God. . . . We see the absolute necessity of this response of the soul (or whatever we may call it) to God, in order to nourish the divine life within. It clearly appears that God does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul constantly responds to him. God anticipates our responses with the blessings of his goodness.

This's what **means of grace** are about. Wesley understood them this way:³⁰

By “the means of grace” I mean *the outward symbols, words, and actions, that God ordained to be the ordinary channels through which he might convey to us his prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace.*”

The Free Methodist Church in Canada takes this very seriously. Think back to the marvellous presentation on Means of Grace that Mary Lee DeWitt gave last General Conference. Or take the “Grace Channels” and other high quality discipling materials on the denominational web site. They’re all cited in the notes! I think this has been the area where this assignment has helped me do the best clarifying.³¹ It has shown me that like many Methodists, I had never grasped how Wesley understands the Means of Grace, especially the “Works of Mercy” kind – which some of us have left to “the *other* kind of Methodism – the one that in earlier generations we wrote off as “liberal” “social-gospel-only,” people we said didn’t care, as *we* do, about the works of piety and holiness of heart and life.”

But Wesley assumed that consistent and faithful caring action must be grow out of the kind of communal spiritual formation we have already talked about,³² and that the one who has experienced real *heart* salvation³³

“doeth good unto all men’—unto neighbours, and strangers, friends, and enemies. And that in every possible kind; not only to their bodies, by ‘feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick or in prison’, but much more does he labour to do good to their souls, as of the ability which God giveth.

Wesley knew that the Bible has a **holistic** view of salvation, modelled by Christ, which included temporal as well as spiritual. Maddox writes,³⁴

Wesley considered providing such things as subsidized boarding schools for children of the poor, free health clinics, and a carefully collected set of inexpensive medical remedies (his *Primitive Physick*) to be an integral part of the salvific mission of Methodism. That is why the select societies, which were committed to promoting the “full salvation” of their members, were specifically instructed to focus attention on addressing the needs of those who lack basic temporal well-being.

Here we must add that Wesley was adamant that we do get to their spiritual need because of the eternal implications involved.

Now if you are from a background like mine, pushing this hard on “works of mercy” immediately elicits some objections or concerns. I find myself wondering:

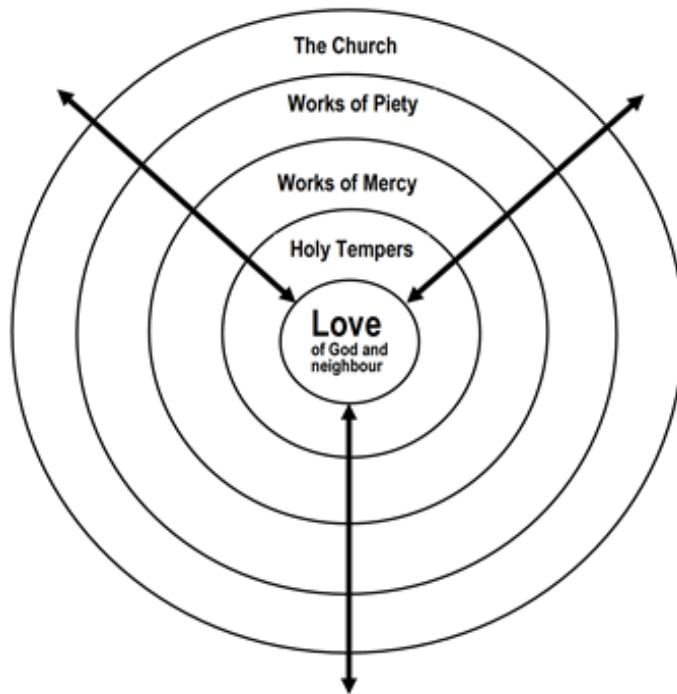
▫ Is there any danger of seeing works of mercy, or any “good works,” as merely our efforts to *earn* holiness? Some of Wesley’s statements, out of context, can be read that way. And we know forms of Christianity which seem to have gone there. **Or**

▫ Isn't he just saying that if we would get enough of the love of Jesus poured into our hearts, or if we would get full enough of the Holy Spirit, works of mercy will just "happen" as one of the natural results?

I've heard both ideas taught. But is either claim true? I've think we've all seen lots of evidence that both are wrong! Wesley will not let us say that works of mercy **earn** us holiness! Nor will he let us say that if we would just get enough holiness in us, works of mercy pop out! Yet he insists they cannot be separated!

I heard in a sermon, the day after I wrote this section, how *Jesus* ties the two together. The section in Matthew 7 which begins with Jesus telling us to **ask, seek, and knock** for the good gifts God our loving Father is eager to give us ends with "**So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.**" Getting God's best and doing what Wesley terms "Works of Mercy" are connected, . . . Jesus says!

In Wesley's sermon on zeal, he builds a model of the relative values of different aspects of Christian experience.³⁵ Let me try to unpack his imagery.



First, **love** is at the heart of it all. Then, closest to the love that fills the throne of our lives are "holy tempers"! What on earth are they?!

Kenneth Collins, citing (who else?!) Maddox is most helpful here. When Wesley says that our "holy tempers" are closest to the throne where love is to reign, he is thinking about a³⁶

"fixed posture of the soul." . . . That is, the tempers are standing orientations towards behavior that are not easily shaken. Moreover, though the tempers can be distinguished from the will itself, they are nevertheless intimately related to it, for they indicate the "direction" of the will, the "objects" towards which it aims.

My best crack at rendering this is to speak of the "settled character" that is formed in a person – a *Christ-like* "settled character."

Now if you were like me, you would put works of piety next, knowing that they are means of grace which help build Christ-like settled character. But Wesley doesn't!

Next is "works of mercy"! He continues, saying that by these works of mercy:

we exercise all holy tempers—by these we continually improve them, so that all these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to.

Works of mercy continually improve our "settled character" in Christ!!

So we are not the first Wesleyans who didn't grasp that God uses "works of mercy" in this way. While Wesley *knows* we need all of the means of grace, he puts "works of mercy" very near the heart of things!!³⁷

Then it is works of piety! Am I the onely one surprised here?! And then it is the church! So you see why I had to change my model this summer?!

I should stress that Wesley insists we need to use them all. We can't say, "OK, I'll engage in works of mercy, but not works of piety" or "Yes, I know I need both of them, but I don't need the church."

My point here is that works of mercy are **important means of grace which God uses to make us more like Jesus!** Timothy Tennant helps us:³⁸

Wesley understood, for example, that if you really want to be formed spiritually you should be eager to go out into a place of pain, roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty serving the poor. ... Wesley took his new preachers out to the brick yards and into the prisons. For Wesley, not only is the world his parish, the world is God's greatest spiritual workshop. It is on the anvil of a suffering world that God shapes and forms his disciples to understand what it means to take up their cross and follow him.

Here I mean no disrespect for the beautiful diagram on the Weyburn site, but it occurred to me that maybe Wesley would say, draw it this way instead!

<u>WORKS OF MERCY</u> (Loving Neighbours)	<u>WORKS OF PIETY</u> (Loving God)
Feed the Hungry, Clothe the Naked	Prayer
Welcome Strangers	The Lord's Supper
Visit the Sick, Visit Prisoners	Scripture
Instruct, Comfort, Encourage	Worship
Save Souls from Death	Fasting
	Christian Conference

[Weyburn's pastor, Jay, already OK'd me saying this!]

Let me try to visualize this with you. What if you and I want to do those works of mercy Wesley talks about (and other things like them) and we want to do them *not* as “religious” requirements that will allow us to get into heaven, but because they are part and parcel of being like Jesus and becoming more like him?! They are beautiful “means of grace” which God uses to form our “settled character”

Wouldn't I *want* to stretch beyond my comfort zones in serving people? Might I become more aware that I need divine help to overcome my self-absorption, and that I will need the prayers and encouragement and feedback (even correction) of those with whom I walk in the Christian life – if I really want to grow up in Christ?

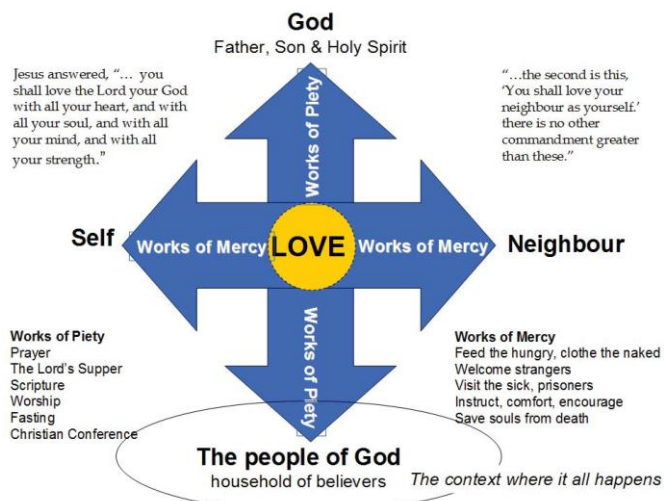
And when I try, and find myself thinking judgmental thoughts (and feeling judgmental feelings) about people whose lives are really messed up (and I think they should “know better”), won't I need to get down on my knees and confess my pride, my arrogance, and ask for the Spirit to give me a more Christ-like character, and a fresh vision of who *I* was apart from Christ, and who I *still am* as his follower! And won't I'd need to tell some people who I walk with about it so there could be some real change in me?

And when I work for justice and find myself alongside radicals who teach as right things the Bible teaches as wrong, won't I need new insight and new love as I build relationships with them, and join them in seeking good in that particular area?

And when I find that what Jesus is clearly calling me to requires self-discipline of the sort I lack, won't I need to share that with the Christians I most closely walk with? And won't I be humbled as I hear them share similar struggles, and be given courage as I see the Spirit helping them break through barriers of fear or laziness?

Let me ask a question to which the answer is obvious. Will those kinds of experiences have anything to do with the great plan of God to form me further and further into Christ's likeness?

Of course they will! And Wesley knew it! This integration is made clear in the image that is included in our denomination's “Grace Channels” materials:



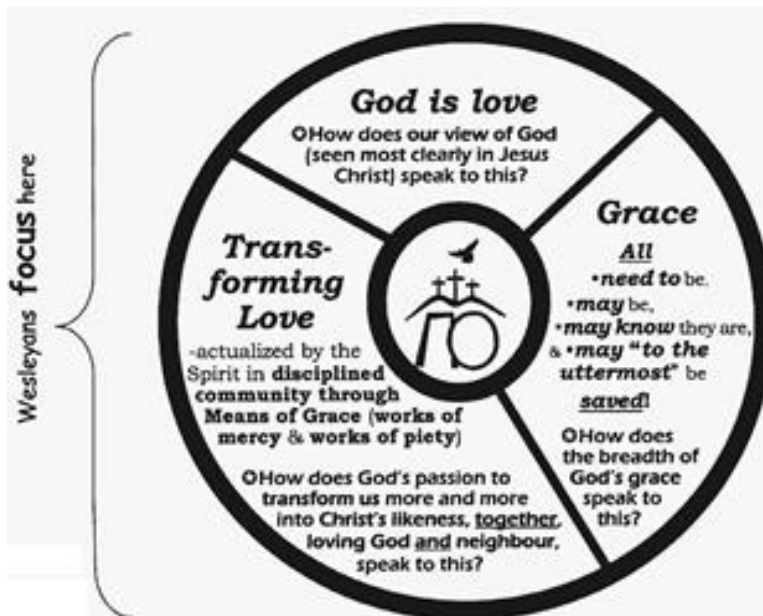
In so many ways that visual lays out the heart of this third Wesleyan essential, this reality that cannot come alive without disciplined community, this reality in which there is no separation between vertical and horizontal!



So here's where we've come to now.

Thus, when a Wesleyan plans next Sunday's sermon, or thinks about adding staff, or considers whether or not to implement some new program (which *will* demand resources), or thinks about how many evenings of the week are going to be spent in busyness, one of the key questions we will ask is:

❖ How does God's passion for us to **grow into and in deep Christ-like mercy and piety in disciplined community** speak to "this"?



We have now outlined where Wesleyans **keep our eyes!**

But there *are* functions to monitor. There are warning lights.



I have become deeply convinced over the summer that the first one, for Wesleyans, **has** to be our

USE OF THE BIBLE.

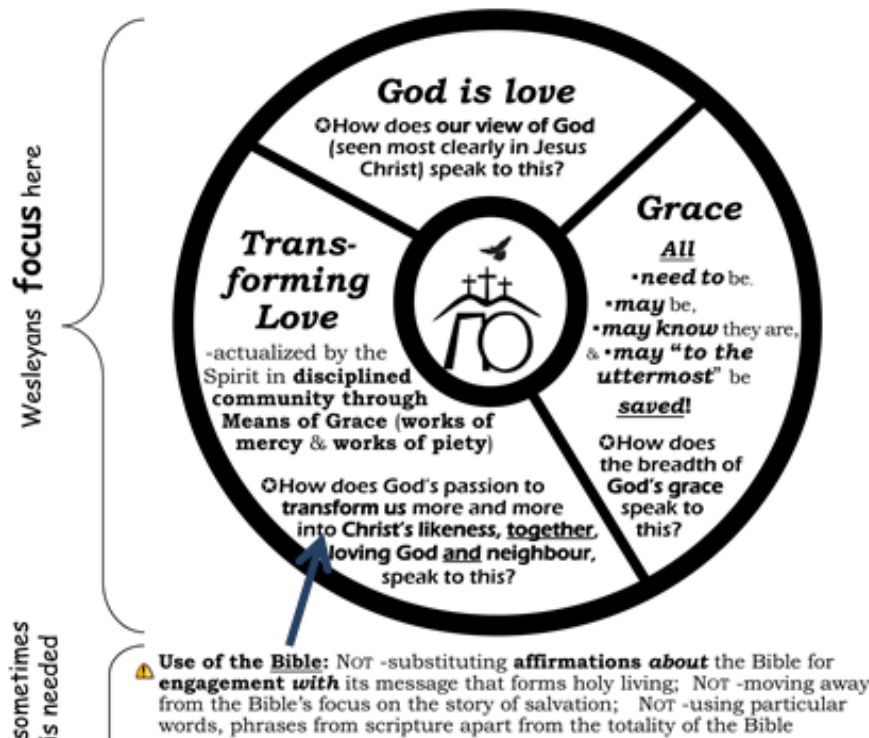
I love how Joel Green says it.³⁹

To affirm the authority of Scripture is to adopt habits of reading and prayer that lead to the conformity of our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and behaviors to God's will revealed in Scripture. We find here, in the pages of Scripture, who we are and what we are to become. Accordingly, we acknowledge and invite the ongoing work of Scripture's divine author as the One who desires to shape us as a community, the church, God's people.

That's a modern way of saying what Wesley, the man who kept telling his people about many books, said in this famous statement:⁴⁰

I want to know one thing,—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: For this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the Book of God! I have it: Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri* [a man of one book]. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: Only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his book; for this end, to find the way to heaven.

Reading, memorizing, praying and reflecting on the Bible are first and foremost about the salvation journey (“the way to heaven”). So you need to take your pen and run an arrow from Use of the Bible right up into **Transforming Love**!!!



Essentially, **that** is the “Wesleyan” approach to the Bible!

But it is NOT Scripture as *formative* OR Scripture *read carefully and insightfully*. It is BOTH! This is from an address to the clergy (maybe the MEGaP won't seem so demanding now!):⁴¹

Let us each seriously examine himself. Have I such a knowledge of Scripture, as becomes him who undertakes to explain it to others, that it may be a light in all their paths? Have I a full and clear view of the analogy of faith, which is the clue to guide me through the whole? Am I acquainted with the several parts of Scripture; with all parts of the Old Testament and the New? Upon the mention of any text, do I know the context, and the parallel places? Have I that point at least of a good textuary [*one who is well informed in the Bible or in biblical scholarship*]? Do I know the grammatical construction of the four Gospels; of the Acts; of the Epistles; and am I a master of the spiritual sense (as well as the literal) of what I read? Do I understand the scope of each book, and how every part of it tends thereto? Have I skill to draw the natural inferences deducible from each text?

Wesleyans care about knowing how to read and explain and apply the scriptures!

. Building on that, Wesleyan interpretation of Scripture is⁴²

focused on soteriology and follows the “analogy of faith”

Wesleyans know that God gave us the Bible to open up salvation to us. Here is how the *Wesley Study Bible* introduces the idea of the “analogy of faith.”⁴³

Protestants since the Reformation have used the phrase to convey the idea that there is a deep pattern in the message of Scripture that helps us interpret it. Individual passages of Scripture are read in relation to each other according to how they fit into this pattern. What guides our understanding is not any single statement but a sense of the whole shape of Christian faith. For John Wesley, that “sense of the whole” was reflected in how he understood the way of salvation: humans have a problem that God overcomes in Jesus Christ, so that our sin is forgiven and we are able to live a new life of inward and outward holiness. This basic framework guided his reading of Scripture, as well as formed the structure for the way he proclaimed the gospel.

Reading the Bible in Wesleyan ways is not about going to the Bible to get answers to every question **I** think is important, but letting the Bible as a whole speak me about the questions **it (and its Divine source)** deem important! Wesleyans do not try to force the Bible to answer questions it is not trying to answer!!

Related closely is the fact that Wesleyan interpretation of Scripture insists that any one text is to be interpreted in light of the whole.⁴⁴ So Wesleyans don't build doctrines on one or two verses, especially verses whose teaching isn't all that clear. This is so needed in our days! I was going to name several areas where scripture is abused among us in these ways, but I think it better for the team if I leave that to the Holy Spirit. It's better for *me* too, for as I reflected on what I was going to do, I

realized that it would feed my arrogance. **I** was going to get too much of a kick out of it! We need to let the Spirit get to the specifics with us here. We can ask him:

- ✪ Do I immerse myself in the Bible with the prime aim of being shaped by it into the image of Christ, and only secondarily to look for “information”?
- ✪ Do I avoid using, in ministry or in applying the Bible to my life, concepts or schemas or “teachings” that are built on a word or phrase found in only one or two places somewhere in the Bible – and possibly taken out of their overall Biblical context?
- ✪ Do I intentionally try not to “stand over” the Bible, demanding that it give me answers to my questions, as opposed to focusing humbly on what God wants to say to me?
- ✪ Do I refrain from using scripture heavily to teach on things that have nothing to do with the overall plan of God for the salvation/transformation/healing of people and the world?

If the answer is “yes” in any of these areas, we need to *stop* using the Bible in non-Wesleyan ways!

Next – and because of **that** kind of use of scripture – comes

CONJUNCTIVITY/HOLISM

Steve Harper says this so well: ⁴⁵

We combine beliefs rather than separate them—for example: faith and works, personal and social, heart and head, word and table, piety and mercy, Christ and culture. We believe the sum is greater than the whole of the parts. When theology is done dynamically, we have a greater depth of knowledge which can lead to a deeper life of discipleship.

Wesley grasped the need for holding together emphases from throughout Christian teaching. For example, he knew that a distorted vision of Christ and Christian life would result if we looked at following Christ *only* as prophet, or *only* as priest, or *only* as king. I sent this list on LISTSERV: ⁴⁶

5 KEY AFFIRMATIONS OF A WESLEYAN HOLISTIC FAITH

Randy Maddox

- 1) not just about **rational assent**, but **responsive trust** as well;
- 2) not just about **forgiveness**, but **spiritual transformation** as well
- 3) not just about **individuals**, but **society** as well;
- 4) not just for **souls**, but **bodies** as well, and
- 5) not just for **humans**, but for the **whole of creation!**

So we might ask:

☛How do I balance these contrasting realities in my personal life and ministry?
Where do I see the need for greater balance?

Many Wesleyans refer to another indicator: **CONNECTION.**

Here we could talk about Wesley's "catholic spirit" and about the passion we've already alluded to for focusing on the things that all biblical Christians agree on. I think Timothy Tennant⁴⁷ can help us summarize here:

Wesley was both ecumenical *and* orthodox; he held firm convictions *and* had an irenic spirit and warm heart towards those with whom he disagreed. . . . Wesley's ecumenism was built on the foundation of a shared theological orthodoxy concerning the historic essentials of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, Methodists seek to take Jesus' prayer in John 17 very seriously when he prays that we "may be one" just as He and the Father are one (John 17:22).

Lastly we come to **FINAL ACCOUNTABILITY.**

It surely won't surprise us to find that a man whose understanding of grace is that it is *co-operative* placed significant emphasis on *how we respond* to God's offer of healing love, and the impact that will have on Judgment Day.⁴⁸ Here is what he says in Sermon 120, "On the Wedding Garment"⁴⁹:

The righteousness of Christ is doubtless necessary for any soul that enters into glory: But so is personal holiness too, for every child of man. But it is highly needful to be observed, that they are necessary in different respects. The former is necessary to *entitle* us to heaven; the latter to *qualify* us for it. Without the righteousness of Christ we could have no *claim* to glory; without holiness we could have no *fitness* for it. By the former we become members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. By the latter "we are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Wesley held to *both* salvation by grace alone *and* the fact that we will all face judgment on that Day! He cared so deeply about those who will face that day without Christ.

We're almost done, but we still have what I almost see as **no-brainers** – things that are *not* at the heart of what it means to be Wesleyan, but yet, here in *our* family, we believe differently from some other Christians. We *don't* believe:⁵⁰

✗ Once saved, always saved – in *every* case

though we would like to do the kind of discipling work that kept the number of exceptions *very* small. This grows out of part 2 above – grace is not irresistible.

We *don't* believe that

X Once saved, always saved – in *every* case

✗ If you are Spirit-filled you will speak in tongues

though we know that God gives some of us that gift. This grows out of our carefulness with Scripture (Warning Light #1).

And we *don't* believe that

X Once saved, always saved – in *every* case

X If you are Spirit-filled you will speak in tongues

✗ What will be will be (i.e. God alone decides who will be saved)

We've already said much about this. This ties back to who we understand God to be (#1 in our model).

* * * *

Now let's tie things up. It occurs to me that if you look at that grid carefully, surely some of you want to say, "Hold it! There's nothing exclusively Wesleyan about that! That grid looks like what many Spirit-filled, passionate Christians care most about! **What is so "Wesleyan" about that?**" Ruth asked me that over one supper when I was telling her, for the nine-hundredth time, where this talk was going!

What do you think? What did *Wesley* think? Let me give you a practical example.

For years, the Free Methodist Church had an Article of Religion that read:

Entire sanctification

Entire sanctification is that work of the Holy Spirit, subsequent to regeneration, by which the fully consecrated believers, upon exercise of faith in the atoning blood of Christ, are cleansed in that moment from all inward sin and empowered for service. The resulting relationship is attested by the witness of the Holy Spirit and is maintained by faith and obedience. Entire sanctification enables believers to love God with all their hearts, souls, strength, and minds, and their neighbor as themselves, and it prepares them for greater growth in grace.

It was titled after one word in one verse of scripture, majored on minors, and said things that, in order to be true, would require a truckload of footnotes.

But in a process that started in Canada, that Article was replaced by our church around the world with this one:

Sanctification

Sanctification is that saving work of God beginning with new life in Christ whereby the Holy Spirit renews His people after the likeness of God, changing them through crisis and process, from one degree of glory to another, and conforming them to the image of Christ.

As believers surrender to God in faith and die to self through full consecration, the Holy Spirit fills them with love and purifies them from sin. This sanctifying relationship with God remedies the divided mind, redirects the heart to God, and empowers believers to please and serve God in their daily lives.

Thus, God sets His people free to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love their neighbor as themselves.

I was with a retired banker friend who is a leader in a Baptist Church when I heard that this statement was finally official around the world. So I showed it to himAND HE LOVED IT! He said it aligned with *his* heart passion!!

. . . . Are we disappointed? NO! Free Methodists around the world agreed that the new Article is more truly “Wesleyan”, though there is nothing “peculiar” in it. Wesley would be glad my Baptist friend loved it! I hope you are too!

Now what is our bottom line as Wesleyans?

1. **God is love.**
2. God’s love reaches out to us in **grace upon grace.**
3. God’s love **deeply transforms** his people in **disciplined community** – through crucial **means of grace** that involve BOTH **works of mercy** AND **works of piety!**

You already have a first draft of a “now what?” grid for ongoing theological reflection. Please take out your card with these reflection questions on it. You’ve already heard them and seen them. I leave them with you for days to come.

WESLEYAN REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ✧ How does **our view of God** (seen most clearly in Jesus Christ) speak to “this”?
- ✧ How does the immensity of **God’s grace** speak to “this”?
- ✧ How does God’s passion for us to **grow into and in deep Christ-like mercy and piety in disciplined community** speak to “this”?
- ✧ Are we ignoring one side of a **biblical both/and** as we think about “this”?
- ✧ Are there things about “this” which we need to check out with **those to whom we are connected**?
- ✧ How does “this” look in light of the **judgment day** of Christ?

Using the Bible in Wesleyan Ways

- ✧ Do I immerse myself in the Bible with the prime aim of being shaped by it into the image of Christ, and only secondarily to look for “information”?
- ✧ Do I avoid using, in ministry or in applying the Bible to my life, concepts or schemas or “teachings” that are built on a word or phrase found in only one or two places somewhere in the Bible – and possibly taken out of their overall Biblical context?
- ✧ Do I intentionally try not to “stand over” the Bible, demanding that it give me answers to my questions, as opposed to focusing humbly on what God wants to say to me?
- ✧ Do I refrain from using scripture heavily to teach on things that have nothing to do with the overall plan of God for the salvation/transformation/healing of people and the world?

John W. Vlainic, Sep. 24 & Oct. 1, 2013

I want to end with my gratitude to our Bishop and NLT for the assignment, to you for listening and for responding in hours and days to come, and most of all to Ruth, who out of her love both for me and for our church supported me in this work.

Thank you!

¹ “Wesleyan” here refers not to a denomination, but to those whose orientation to Christian faith and life have been significantly shaped by John Wesley and the Methodist family.

² Cited in Steven W. Manskar. *Opening Ourselves to Grace: The Means of Grace and Discipleship*,
<http://igrc.s3.amazonaws.com/A13457CC6BC2418B871FB206DC2088FD_Opening_Ourselves_to_Grace.pdf>

³ Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist,” in *Works of John Wesley*, 8:340. This is well laid out by Joel Green, “A Wesleyan Understanding of Biblical Authority: The Formation of Holy Lives in Al Truesdale, ed., *Square Peg: Why Wesleyans Aren’t Fundamentalists* (Beacon Hill Press, 2012), pp. 127-137.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John Wesley, “The Way to the Kingdom,” in modern English in Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *John Wesley on Christian Beliefs: The Standard Sermons in Modern English*, Volume 1 (Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 129.

⁶ On how close Wesley and Calvin were, see Chris Bounds & Keith Drury, “John Wesley – The Calvinist: John Wesley, Contemporary Wesleyanism and the Reformed Tradition,”

<<http://www.drurywriting.com/keith/wesley.the.calvinist.htm>>

⁷ Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Beacon Hill Press, 1972).

⁸ Sermon 110, “Free Grace,” §§25–26, *Works* 3:555–56; Maddox, “Theology in the Twenty-first Century,” p. 56.

⁹ <<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/how-does-a-sovereign-god-love>>

¹⁰ Jerry Walls video at <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzWN0Kw3Bl0>> See too Roger Olson, <<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogerolson/2013/04/a-non-calvinist-relational-view-of-gods-sovereignty/>>

¹¹ <http://www.victorshepherd.on.ca/Course/STI/systematic_theology_i9.htm>

¹² After God as loving Father, Coppedge sees grace as clearly the second basic Wesleyan theme. Allan Coppedge, “How Wesleyans Do Theology,” in John D. Woodbridge & Thomas Edward McComiskey, eds., *Doing Theology in Today’s World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Kantzer* (Zondervan, 1991), 267-289.

¹³ Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *John Wesley on Christian Beliefs: The Standard Sermons in Modern English* Volume 1 (Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 208.

¹⁴ Gregory A. Boyd, *Benefit of the Doubt: Breaking the Idol of Certainty* (Baker Books, 2013), p. 141.

¹⁵ Theodore H. Runyon, “Wesleyan Roots of Pastoral Care and Counseling, *Exploring the Range of Theology* (Wipf & Stock, 2012), p. 159.

¹⁶ John Wesley, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation” <<http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/85/>>

¹⁷ Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Zondervan, 1994), p. 247.

¹⁸ Theodore Runyon, “Wesleyan of Pastoral Care and Counseling,” *Exploring the Range of Theology* (Wipf & Stock, 2012), pp. 188-200; cf. p. 200.

¹⁹ John Wesley, *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies*, Works 9:69–73; cited in abbreviated form in Randy L. Maddox, “Celebrating the Whole Wesley’ A Legacy for Contemporary Wesleyans,” *Methodist History* 43.2 (2005): 74–89; citation p. 82.

²⁰ *A Farther Appeal*, Pt. I, §I.3, Works 11:106; quoted in Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences, and Differences,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 45.2 (1990): 29–53; citation p. 39.

²¹ Howard A. Snyder, “What’s Unique About a Wesleyan Theology of Mission? A Wesleyan Perspective on Free Methodist Missions” (Consultation Draft from FM Missions Consultation, Indianapolis, IN, October 11–13, 2002).

²² Randy L. Maddox, “Theology of John and Charles Wesley,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism*, Edited by Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. New York: T&T Clark, 2010; 20–35 (29).

²³ Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection As Believed and Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley: A Transcription in Modern English, With Scripture References and Annotations* (Emeth Press, 2012), pp. xii–xiii.

²⁴ Kevin M. Watson, “Are There Wesleyan Basics Worth Reclaiming?” <<http://vitalpiety.com/2009/04/14/are-there-wesleyan-basics-worth-reclaiming/>>; see also his “The Form and Power of Godliness: Wesleyan Communal Discipline as Voluntary Suffering,” <http://wesley.nnu.edu/fileadmin/imported_site/wts/42_annual_meeting/papers/The_Form_and_Power_of_Godlines_Kevin_M._Watson_42nd_WTS_Meeting.pdf>

²⁵ Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (InterVarsity Press, 1980), p. 162.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 162–163.

²⁷ <http://www.veyburnfmc.com/Wesleyan_Means_of_Grace.html>

²⁸ Maddox, “Wesley’s Prescription for ‘Making Disciples of Jesus Christ’: Insights for the 21st Century Church,” *Quarterly Review* 23.1 (2003): 15–28 (19); <http://divinity.duke.edu/sites/default/files/documents/faculty-maddox/22_Wesleys_Prescription_Duke.pdf>

²⁹ Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *John Wesley on Christian Beliefs: The Standard Sermons in Modern English* Volume 1 (Abingdon Press, 2002), p. 322.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

³¹ By far the most helpful reading for me on this was in the Heitzenrater edited book, *The Wesleys and the Poor: The Legacy and Development of Methodist Attitudes to Poverty, 1729–1999*,³¹ especially Randy L. Maddox, “Visit the Poor’: John Wesley, the Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers,” in Heitzenrater, ed., *The Wesleys and the Poor*, 59–81; <http://divinity.duke.edu/sites/default/files/documents/faculty-maddox/16_Visit_the_Poor.pdf>

³² Maddox, “Visit the Poor,” p. 64.

³³ John Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist.” <<http://new.gbmg-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/character/>>

³⁴ Randy Maddox, “Visit the Poor’: John Wesley, The Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers,” in Richard P. Heitzenreiter, ed., *The Poor and the People Called Methodists 1729–1999* (Kingswood Books, 2002) p. 68.

³⁵ The diagram illustrates relationships in material from Wesley's Sermon 92, "On Zeal." In section II.5, he answers his own question about how the elements of Christian zeal/love rise one above another, and what is the comparative value of them. This version of the diagram is adapted slightly from the one in Stephen W. Manskar, "Opening Ourselves to Grace: The Means of Grace and Discipleship," <http://igrc.s3.amazonaws.com/A13457CC6BC2418B871FB206DC2088FD_Opening_Ourselves_to_Grace.pdf>.

³⁶ Kenneth J. Collins, "John Wesley's Topography of the Heart: Dispositions, Tempers, and Affections," *Methodist History* 36:3 (Apr 1998) 165-175.

³⁷ Randy L. Maddox, "Wesley's Prescription for Making Disciples of Jesus Christ: Insights for the 21st Century Church."

³⁸ Timothy Tennant, "Missional Movement – Social Consciousness: Why I am a Methodist and an Evangelical,"

<<http://timothytennant.com/2011/07/20/missional-movement-%E2%80%93-social-consciousness-why-i-am-a-methodist-and-an-evangelical-part-7/>>

³⁹ Joel Green, "A Wesleyan Understanding of Biblical Authority: The Formation of Holy Lives," in Al Truesdale, ed., *Square Peg: Why Wesleyans Aren't Fundamentalists* (Beacon Hill Press, 2012), pp. 127-137

⁴⁰ Wesley, "Preface to the Sermons 1-53."

<<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/sermons.iv.html>>

⁴¹ John Wesley, "An Address to the Clergy," *Works* II.1.1, 10:490-491.

⁴² Donald W. Dayton, "The Use of Scripture in the Wesleyan Tradition,"

<<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=13>>

⁴³ Joel B. Green, "Reading the Bible as Wesleyans," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* Volume 33, Number 2, Fall 1998; pp. 116-129 (127).

⁴⁴ "How to Read the Bible as a Wesleyan," p. 48;

<<http://www.nph.com/vcmedia/2407/2407498.pdf>>

⁴⁵ Steve Harper, "What Does It Mean to be Wesleyan?" *The Asbury Herald*, Volume 116, Number 2 (Spring 2006), pp. 9-11.

⁴⁶ http://divinity.duke.edu/sites/default/files/documents/faculty-maddox/02_Celebrating_the_Whole_Wesley.pdf [summarized by Bob Hunter at <http://www.naznet.com/community/archive/index.php/t-1810.html>]

⁴⁷ Timothy Tennant, "Doctrinal Clarity – Catholic spirit: Why I am a Methodist and an Evangelical," <<http://timothytennant.com/2011/07/22/doctrinal-clarity-%E2%80%93-catholic-spirit-why-i-am-a-methodist-and-an-evangelical-part-8-2/>>

⁴⁸ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Kingswood Books, 1994), p. 251.

⁴⁹ <<http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/120/>> See also Kenneth Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Abingdon, 2007), pp. 320-322.

⁵⁰ Adapted from Robert Stutes, "Five Things Methodists Don't Believe"

<[HTTP://BELLVILLEUMC.BLOGSPOT.CA/2006/06/FIVE-THINGS-METHODISTS-DONT-BELIEVE.HTML](http://BELLVILLEUMC.BLOGSPOT.CA/2006/06/FIVE-THINGS-METHODISTS-DONT-BELIEVE.HTML)>