



GROW.PRAY.STUDY

Weekly Study Guide



Roots: Our Methodist Heritage—Works of Mercy

November 11, 2018

Scriptures:

Matthew 25:31-40 (The Message)

“When he finally arrives, blazing in beauty and all his angels with him, the Son of Man will take his place on his glorious throne. Then all the nations will be arranged before him and he will sort the people out, much as a shepherd sorts out sheep and goats, putting sheep to his right and goats to his left. “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Enter, you who are blessed by my Father! Take what’s coming to you in this kingdom. It’s been ready for you since the world’s foundation. And here’s why:

I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me a drink, I was homeless and you gave me a room, I was shivering and you gave me clothes, I was sick and you stopped to visit, I was in prison and you came to me.

Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.’

James 2:14-18 (CEB)

My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can’t save anyone, can it? Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. What if one of you said, “Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!”? What good is it if you don’t actually give them what their body needs? In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn’t result in faithful activity. Someone might claim, “You have faith and I have action.” But how can I see your faith apart from your actions? Instead, I’ll show you my faith by putting it into practice in faithful action.

Introduction to the Study

Wesley’s faith and that of the early Methodists differed in some

ways from modern evangelical Christianity. Often in modern evangelicalism, the goal and the gauge of the Christian life is to have a deep and profound “personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” That is the chief end of the Christian life. Wesley called people to a deeply personal faith in Christ, to accept God’s love for them, and to reciprocate God’s love. He taught and preached that we must trust in Christ for our salvation. But he was also clear that this was not the end of faith, but only its beginning and foundation. Wesley taught that growing in Christ also involved loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Many evangelical and mainline Christians today have heard only half a gospel. They come to faith never hearing a word about justice or serving alongside the poor, working to meet the needs of those outside the church, or seeking to make the community more like the Kingdom of God. Their mission is to bring people to Jesus and be more personally pious. But Rich Stearns of World Vision says “We must move beyond an anemic view of our faith as something only personal and private, with no public dimension, and instead see it as the source of power that can change the world.”

To help the early Methodists grow in faith, Wesley developed the General Rules of the Methodist people—three simple rules that reminded Methodists of a pattern of life that would help them love God and neighbor. The rules can be summarized as: 1) Do no harm 2) Do good and 3) Stay in love with God. This last rule was meant to be accomplished by practicing what Wesley called the *Means of Grace*: prayer, scripture reading, public worship, meeting in small groups, receiving the Eucharist, talking about your faith with others, and serving others. This was what it meant to be Methodist: trusting Christ, then consciously, daily, seeking to live for God by avoiding evil, doing good, and pursuing the Spiritual Disciplines. Based on this, are you a Methodist?

Daily Study Guides

MONDAY 11/12/18 “*Christianity is essentially a social religion*”

Read Matthew 5:13-16

John Wesley, following the teaching of Jesus, said, “Christianity is essentially a social religion.” Jesus did not retreat and live in isolation, and he doesn’t call Christians to vacate their cultures for an exclusively Christian environment. God’s followers are to be “salt and light” to the world. God empowers us to “preserve” what is good and live lives that shine light into the darkness of our world.

- Lamps light up the darkness. It would be pointless to light a lamp and cover it up. Jesus compared his followers to a lamp in a dark room, or a city on a hill, seen for miles around. God still calls us to be light, to help the lost find their way. What choices do you make in your attitudes and actions to ensure that those around you see Jesus’ light more clearly

when they are with you?

- In Jesus' day, there was no electricity or refrigerators. People preserved food with salt. In today's passage, Jesus said his followers should be "salt of the earth," living in such a way that they "preserve" what is good in the world. He said that if people lose their "saltiness," they are "good for nothing." In what ways are you living out your faith so as to preserve the good in the world? What would be the point of following Jesus if not to join in his mission to be salt and light in the world?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are not a secret to be kept. Shine your light of love through me, this day and every day, and use me to make the world you love a bit more like the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

TUESDAY 11/13/18 ***"Works of mercy ... which are real means of grace"***

Read Ephesians 2:4-10

Paul, as a preacher of God's saving grace, wrote when we accept that grace, we live as people created...to do good things." To people who argued grace made Christian actions unnecessary, Wesley said, "Surely there are works of mercy...which are real means of grace."

- The Second General Rule of the Methodist Church is Wesley's way of applying the idea that we are "created in Christ Jesus to do good things": In what ways does the phrase "doing good of every possible sort" spark your imagination? What are one or two "sorts" of goodness you now do as a follower of Christ?
- What is your purpose? (Saying "I don't know" doesn't mean you don't have one.) Spend some quiet time today reflecting on your life's purpose in the light of what Ephesians 2:10 says about God's intention for your life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for offering me the gift of your saving, transforming grace. Guide me this day as I seek to live into the reality of the good things you've created me to do. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 11/14/18 ***"We were enabled to feed ... a hundred and fifty a day"*** **Read 1 John 3:14-18**

The apostle John said no one filled with God's love could see a brother or sister in need and not try to help. John Wesley wrote of a time when he lived this out: "At Hannam, four miles from Bristol ... I made a collection in our congregation for the relief of the poor...who, having no work... and no assistance from the parish...were reduced to the last extremity. I made another collection on Thursday and a third on Sunday, by which we were enabled to feed a hundred, sometimes a hundred and fifty, a day, of those whom we found to need it most."

- John used strong words about those who saw people in need and didn't care. He said such people hated their brothers and sisters, which made them murderers. Can apathy and inaction have results as murderous as active malice? What ways have you found to help yourself avoid

“compassion fatigue,” and remain sensitive when God nudges you to help someone in need?

- U2 lead singer Bono uses the term “stupid poverty” to refer to problems (like the lack of clean drinking water in parts of Africa) which we could eliminate with a fraction of the money spent on NFL games or TV awards shows. How can we become more like Wesley, who instead of saying “Someone ought to help those hungry people” took simple, direct action and helped?

Prayer: Loving Lord, you taught us “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Keep growing a heart within me that rejoices in your kind of giving. Amen.

THURSDAY 11/15/18 “Where is the justice?...Where is the mercy?”

Read Isaiah 1:11-18, 42:1-7

The prophet Isaiah pointed out, on God’s behalf, the injustices rampant in ancient Israel. Then, three times in four verses, Isaiah 42 says God’s servant would bring justice. Wesley visited one “poor prisoner,” falsely charged with a big offense instead of the petty crime he’d committed. He wrote , “Where is the justice of swelling 4 pounds into 577? Where is the common sense of taking up 14 sheets to tell a story that may be told in 10 lines? Where is the mercy of thus grinding the face of the poor, thus sucking the blood of a poor, beggared prisoner?”

- Jesus quoted Isaiah 61 and 58 to define his mission: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed” (Luke 4:18). Do you think those were just symbolic words about spiritual captivity, or did Jesus, like Wesley, want to help actual “poor, beggared prisoners”? What are some practical ways you can live out God’s concern for justice today?
- In Isaiah 1:13, the prophet said on God’s behalf, “Stop bringing worthless offerings.” As you read the rest of the passage, what made their offerings “worthless”? With so much concern about identity theft and Internet scams, we know technology can make doing wrong more efficient. Can you think of ways technology can also empower those who seek justice? What does it look like in the United States in 2013 to “help the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow”?

Prayer: Lord God, sometimes trying to live out your justice can seem confusing—so many points of view, so many conflicting interests. Give me your wisdom to live a life that honors your ideal of justice. Amen.

FRIDAY 11/16/18 “That grand pest... a faith without works”

Read James 2:14-26

Wesley learned firsthand the folly of trying to earn God’s favor through

good works. But he found that some Christians thought “salvation by faith” meant good works are optional. In his sermon “The Mystery of Iniquity,” he said, “When St. James wrote his Epistle... that grand pest of Christianity, a faith without works, was spread far and wide; filling the Church with a ‘wisdom from beneath,’ which was ‘earthly, sensual, devilish.’” He knew true faith produces actions that honor God.

- James vividly pointed out the flaw in thinking that genuine faith could be limited to intellectual knowledge: “It’s good that you believe that God is one. Ha! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble with fear.” Whose example most powerfully drew you to a faith that includes your heart and your hands as well as your head?
- Notice James didn’t talk about a good “balance” between faith and works, as though we need a 50-50 mix. We need 100% of both, and our works need to grow out of our faith, as a grateful response to God’s grace. What are some actions—works—that you have seen grow in your life as you responded to God’s grace?

Prayer: Loving Lord, you have accepted me as your child, and you have begun to reshape the way I live as I respond to your grace. Please continue your work in my life, that my works may always bring you glory. Amen.

SATURDAY 11/117/18 “Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, lodging the stranger” Read Matthew 25:31-46

Looking back, it’s easy to see that John Wesley and his followers made a big impact for good, first in Britain and then in America. Studying Wesley’s life reminds us that it didn’t happen with one big sermon or campaign. Many, many (often small) acts of grace and caring in the end changed the world. In his sermon “The Reward of the Righteous,” Wesley urged his hearers, “While you are promoting this comprehensive charity, which contains feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, lodging the stranger; indeed all good works in one; let those animating words be written on your hearts, and sounding in your ears: ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto ME.’”

- The English word “charity” came from the Greek word *charis* “grace.” In Wesley’s day, it had not taken on the negative sense of dependence or humiliation we sometimes give it. His phrase “comprehensive charity which contains...all good works in one” pictures the kind of life Jesus calls his followers to live. What are the main ways you are involved in honoring God by serving others? Consider making your service more “comprehensive” by serving in one way you never have before.

Prayer: O God, keep my eyes and my heart open to see your face in the faces of hurting people around me who need your touch through me. Amen.