



GROW.PRAY.STUDY

Weekly Study Guide



Roots: Our Methodist Heritage—The Necessity of Grace

November 4, 2018

Scriptures:

Ephesians 2:8-10 (CEB)

You are saved by God’s grace because of your faith. This salvation is God’s gift. It’s not something you possessed. It’s not something you did that you can be proud of. Instead, we are God’s accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.

Introduction to the Study

There’s so much we, as United Methodists, should know and need to know about John and Charles Wesley and the movement they started that eventually became the Methodist church! So while this week’s sermon focuses on Wesley’s enlightened understanding of the necessity of grace, our GPS looks more broadly at the development of the Methodist Movement: the Societies, the Bands, the Hymns, and the evolution of the Methodist governing system, beginning with the General Rules.

Daily Study Guides

MONDAY 11/5/18 “Mr. Wesley, not being permitted to preach in the church ...” **Read John 16:1-4, Matthew 5:10-12**

When John Wesley went to Epworth, his hometown, he drily noted that the curate “did not care to accept of my assistance.” Then, he wrote, “After sermon John Taylor stood in the churchyard and gave notice as the people were coming out, ‘Mr. Wesley, not being permitted to preach in the church, designs to preach here at six o’clock’ ... at six I came and found such a congregation as I believe Epworth never saw before. I stood ... upon my father’s tombstone, and cried, ‘The kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost’ [Rom. 14:17].”

- The apostle Paul wrote, “If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people” (Romans 12:18). Jesus, and John Wesley, did their best to persuade others to accept their message, yet found themselves hated and harassed. In our seemingly more tolerant age,

what forms can “persecution” take? How does Jesus call us to respond if that happens? Who do you trust enough to help you honestly assess if any opposition you face is for Christ’s sake, or due to a failure to make Christ’s message as appealing as possible?

- Jesus, John Wesley and many other servants of God throughout history called for life change, for deeper devotion to God. Yet most of those who fought them claimed their hatred grew out of their devotion to God. How can your love of God help to keep you open to needed changes (personal or organizational), rather than simply reinforcing an innate preference for the status quo?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you didn’t hate even when others hated you. You also didn’t abandon your mission when facing their hate. Keep teaching me how to live with your kind of steadfast love and sense of mission. Amen.

TUESDAY 11/6/18 “Christ died for all”

Read 2 Corinthians 5:11-15

John Wesley concluded, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, that Christ “died for the sake of all,” not just for “the elect.” His faith that God’s all-inclusive love and grace gives us the freedom to choose our eternal fate was not a mere theological technicality, but the basis for his powerful, urgent preaching of salvation. That belief in God’s free grace and our moral freedom (called “Arminian,” after a Dutch preacher, Jacobus Arminius) became a defining part of Methodism.

- Paul, expressing some of his core convictions, wrote, “So we try to persuade people.” What differences do you see between trying to persuade people and trying to force them to believe as you do? In what ways can loving and caring about someone be more persuasive than arguing in an “I’m right—you’re wrong” spirit?
- Through the centuries, “Calvinists” (after John Calvin, who strongly believed that God predestined some people for salvation and the rest for eternal loss) and Arminians have had heated debates. Wesley, in keeping with his “Catholic Spirit,” once wrote, “However I love the persons who assert it, I abhor the doctrine of predestination.” Are you able to love people who hold views different from yours, and will not (at least for now) be persuaded to change?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, even when we Christians differ about just how you save us, we agree that you do, and that we are grateful for that gift. I thank you for the ways your love and grace are at work in my life. Amen.

WEDNESDAY 11/7/18 “The Rules of the Society”

Read Psalm 119:1-16

It was ironic that his critics called Wesley an unruly agitator. He did reach people in atypical ways that shocked some staid British

clergymen, but he was in fact a very disciplined man. It's no surprise to find that, in the same spirit as the writer of Psalm 119, he wrote in his journal, "About fifty of us being met, the Rules of the Society were read over and carefully considered one by one; but we did not find any that could be spared. So we all agreed to abide by them all and to recommend them with our might."

- Bishop Reuben Job, in his book *Three Simple Rules*, paraphrased the three General Rules as "do no harm," "do all the good you can," and "stay in love with God." How can these rules (which Wesley never claimed were on the same level as God's law in the Bible) help you live into the reality the psalmist expressed: "I will give thanks to you with a heart that does right as I learn your righteous rules" (verse 7)?
- Imagine a world where everyone lived by these rules. How much tension, fear, deceit or grief would a world like that have? What is one step you will take to align your life more closely, inwardly and outwardly, with the spirit of the three General Rules? Ask God for grace and the strength of divine love in doing this. Get pastoral or professional help if you need it. "Do no harm," "do all the good you can," and "stay in love with God."

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for accepting me just as I am. Now guide me as, in grateful response to your love, I seek to use these rules to guide me in living more and more as you lived on earth. Amen.

THURSDAY 11/8/18 "No person ever misses his band or class"

Read John 15:9-17

After visiting a Methodist "band" (i.e. small group) of coal miners, John Wesley described their commitment in his journal: "No person ever misses his band or class; they have no jar of any kind among them but with one heart and one mind 'provoke one another to love and to good works.'" This group of plain working people, Wesley said, could be "a pattern" for all Methodists. Love leads to commitment and obedience, as Jesus said in today's passage. Jesus' love for God the Father led him to commit, obey, and share God's love with others, and he calls us to that same kind of commitment, obedience and love.

- Verse 9 started with ten transforming words from Jesus: "As the Father has loved me, I too have loved you." God's love for us calls us to share that love with each other (cf. Matthew 22:37-40). Love breeds commitment—the more we love God and others, the more committed we are to them. How does God's love for you motivate you to greater loyalty? How does your love for others lead you to commit time and energy to them? In what practical ways do you live out your loving commitment to God and others?
- We often react negatively to the idea of obedience, whether because we hate to submit to another, or because so many "authorities" have proved unreliable. But obedience comes readily if it means pleasing someone you love and value! Jesus described that type of obedience—not grudging, coercive or calculating, but obedience born of love for God

and the desire to please and honor him (verse 10). Have you ever longed to please someone, and been happy to “obey” their wishes? Are you able to trust Jesus, submit to him, and know you are better off for putting your life in his hands?

Prayer: Lord God, I love you, and I trust you. I want my life to bring you honor and joy as I obey your guidance. Mold my attitudes and actions from the inside out to always be pleasing to you. Amen.

FRIDAY 11/9/18 “Sing all” Read Psalm 149:1-5

Charles Wesley was the family’s hymn writer—probably the most prolific ever, with over 6,000 hymns to his name. John cared about worship music, too, and published “Directions for Singing” for the use of his Methodist societies. Like the Psalms, they urged everyone to join in singing praises to God.

- Do you sing in worship? Do you ever sing along with your car radio, TV commercials or your iPod? Do you ever sing or hum in the shower, or while doing basic household chores? In what ways have your life experiences created in you either an eagerness to sing to God in worship, or a reluctance to sing where anyone else might hear you?
- Singing, wonderful as it is, is only one form of human expression. The psalmist also wrote, “Let them praise God’s name with dance; let them sing God’s praise with the drum and lyre!... Let the faithful celebrate with glory; let them shout for joy on their beds” (verses 3, 5). What ways of expressing the deep joy God gives you deep inside are most natural for you? How can you use them to praise and honor God?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I offer all glory, praise and honor to you today. Make of my life a song of love to you. Amen.

SATURDAY 11/10/18 “Above all sing spiritually”

Read Ephesians 5:15-21

Wesley’s “Directions for Singing” included some specific musical tips that may make us smile (or applaud). “Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength,” he advised. He followed with a caution: “Do not bawl, so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation ... but strive to unite your voices together.” “Sing in time,” he urged, and in particular “take care not to sing too slow.” But the most important idea came last: “Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature.”

- Jesus told the Samaritan woman he met at Jacob’s Well that the living water he would give her would be “a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life” (John 4:14). That same sense of bubbling,

overflowing gratitude and life fills today's reading. When have you most clearly sensed the joy, meaning and acceptance that God gives bubbling within you? In what ways, musical or otherwise, have you been able to express your thanks for God's gift? Today is Saturday—ask God to fill you with the Spirit as you worship this weekend. Plan to look beyond your mundane concerns in the coming week, and live as a person gratefully making music to the Lord in your heart.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, instead of just numbing my pain, worry or disappointment, you offer me gratitude, purpose and life. Fill me with your Spirit, and send me into the coming week with your song ringing in my heart. Amen.

Something Extra:

This week, reflect on John Wesley preaching in a region called Kingswood. It was a coal mining area in Wesley's day. The coal miners, called colliers, were folks who worked hard and died young. Their children were often poor and uneducated. The miners were a rough group, and, at this time, there wasn't a single church in the area of the mines where they lived. Where, in Phoenix or the larger world, are there regions today that might be the equivalent of Kingswood? In what ways, direct or indirect, can you be involved in Wesley's work of sharing God's grace with the colliers? Is God calling you in any way to get more involved in sharing "beyond the walls" of the church? Next week, share with the group any ideas or learnings you have in this reflection.

Also remember, John Wesley was known to have said, quite boldly, that the world is his parish. How is that reflected in our mission as United Methodists, who are called to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?" How do you or will you contribute to bringing Christ's message of God's grace to the world?