



# GROW.PRAY.STUDY

## Weekly Study Guide



***Roots: Our Methodist Heritage—The Marks of a Methodist***

**November 25, 2018**

### ***Scriptures:***

#### **Deuteronomy 6:4-7 (NKJ)**

<sup>4</sup>“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! <sup>5</sup>You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup>“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. <sup>7</sup>You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

#### **Leviticus 19:17-18 (CEB)**

<sup>17</sup>You must not hate your fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your fellow Israelite strongly, so you don't become responsible for his sin. <sup>18</sup>You must not take revenge nor hold a grudge against any of your people; instead, you must love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.

#### **Matthew 22:36-40 (CEB)**

<sup>36</sup>“Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?” <sup>37</sup>He replied, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup>This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup>And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. <sup>40</sup>All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

#### **Matthew 5:43-48 (CEB)**

<sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. <sup>44</sup>But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you <sup>45</sup>so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup>If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? <sup>47</sup>And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? <sup>48</sup>Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete.

## Introduction to the Study

This week we are not only looking at the end of John Wesley's life and ministry, but also learning about the beginnings and growth of American Methodism, as well as what it means to be a Methodist (The Marks of a Methodist). That's a lot to cover in one week...so let's get started!

### Daily Study Guides

#### **MONDAY 11/26/18 “God was eminently present in the midst of the congregation” 2 Chronicles 6:19-21, 40-42**

75-year-old John Wesley led in building City Road Chapel in London in 1778. Wesley wrote about the day when the Chapel opened in his Journal: “I preached on part of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple [today's Scripture reading]; and both in the morning and afternoon... God was eminently present in the midst of the congregation.”

- Solomon invested a lot of time and resources in building the Temple in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Kings 6). Yet in verse 21, he specifically referred to God's “heavenly dwelling place”—he knew God wasn't limited to any one earthly building. But his prayer confidently asked God, “May your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayers of this place.” Which places of worship have particularly helped you draw near to God, and sense that God was attentive to you and your needs?
- Solomon's prayer reflected his sense that the Temple's deepest value lay, not in its furnishings or design, but in God's presence in the people who worshipped there. John Wesley knew that, too, and described his City Road Chapel as “perfectly neat, but not fine, and contains far more people than the Foundry.” Which impresses you more: a church building's external furnishings and finery, or the inner beauty of God's work in human hearts through the ministry in that structure?

**Prayer:** Lord, I join Solomon in praying, “Lord, my God, listen to your servant's prayer and request, and hear the cry and prayer that I your servant pray to you.” Amen.

#### **TUESDAY 11/27/18 “Diffuse the religion of love”**

##### **Romans 13:8-14, 1 John 4:11-16**

The City Road Chapel, like any building, was important, not as a monument to John Wesley or the early Methodists, but as a tool God could use to awaken and revive hearts. When they laid the Chapel's foundation, Wesley urged those present, “Let our hearts be joined herein; let us unite our wishes and prayers; let our whole soul pant after a general revival of pure religion and undefiled, the restoration of the image of God, pure love, in every child of man! ... let us, with all diligence, diffuse the religion of love among all we [interact] with.”

- Paul called Christians in Rome to revive their faith. John Wesley’s message of God’s free grace, and the holy lives our response to grace produces, revived Christianity across Britain and on the American continent. In what ways do you need a similar revival in your own walk with God? How might your changed life inspire revival in the lives of others you spend time with?
- People often think “righteous” people are not very pleasant to be around, that being a Christian makes you judgmental and unloving. That was not the apostle John’s view! John Wesley quoted his words, urging Methodists, “Let us provoke all men, not to enmity and contention, but to love and good works; always remembering those deep words... ‘God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him!’” In what ways has following Christ made you and your relationships more loving?

**Prayer:** Living Lord, please help me to take in, and then live out, “the religion of love.” I want to live in love, to live in you and to have you live in me. Amen.

**WEDNESDAY 11/28/18 “Be a good steward” Luke 9:23-26**

The early Methodists’ faith tended to lead them to work harder, be more trustworthy and honest and less inclined to squander their money on drink, gambling or other things. Their growing wealth concerned Wesley. In one sermon, he said, “Having first gained all you can, and secondly saved all you can, then give all you can.” In another, he urged, “Touching this point of denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily... sit as loose to all things here below, as if you were a poor beggar. Be a good steward of the manifold gifts of God.”

- How would you define “materialism”? The *MacMillan Dictionary* defines it as “the belief that money and possessions are the most important aspects of human existence.” In what central ways did Jesus’ teaching and way of life point to a completely different view of what is most important in human existence? How have you found your faith in Jesus altering the materialistic assumptions our culture tends to teach us?
- Even as Wesley told the Methodists, “Having first gained all you can, and secondly saved all you can, then give all you can,” he surely knew human nature would be far more inclined to follow the first and second precepts than the third. Are you more generous with your material possessions than you were a year ago? In what ways can you cooperate with God to loosen the grip of material things on your heart and mind?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I like to gain as much as I can, and sometimes I like to save, too. Grow in me a heart that takes just as much delight in giving as much as I can to honor you and to bless the lives of others. Amen.

**THURSDAY 11/29/18 “To clothe them that needed it most”**

**Matthew 25:19-23**

John Wesley himself remained a “good and faithful servant.” He made one of the most remarkable entries in his Journal when he was 81. He wrote, “On this and the four following days I walked through the town and

begged two hundred pounds in order to clothe them that needed it most. But it was hard work as most of the streets were filled with melting snow... so that my feet were steeped in snow water nearly from morning till evening.”

- Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25 did not tie either servant’s “good and faithful” quality to the amount he brought the master. (The second servant brought less than the first servant began with!) It was their energy and willingness to do the master’s will that made each one a good and faithful servant. In what particular ways is God calling you to serve? How are you energetic and willing in answering the call and doing your master’s will?
- Richard Foster, well-known author of *Celebration of Discipline*, also wrote *Freedom of Simplicity*. He gave the first chapter the paradoxical title “The Complexity of Simplicity.” Jesus calls us all to live with Wesley’s spirit of devotion to God and service to others. The complexity comes as we realize that it won’t do to simply imitate all of his actions. How do you cultivate a listening heart, a spirit receptive to God’s direction? What do you believe it means for you to be a “good and faithful servant?”

**Prayer:** Lord God, this day I face many choices. Guide me by your Spirit, that I may make those choices in ways that honor you as my King and my Lord. Amen.

### **FRIDAY 11/30/18 “Fortify us against the fear of death” 1 Corinthians 15:51-58**

Paul reminded Christians in Corinth that when Jesus rose from the grave, he conquered death. Death has been “swallowed up by a victory.” In John Wesley’s sermon “On the Resurrection of the Dead,” he drew on Paul’s words, and said, “Let this especially fortify us against the fear of death: It is now disarmed, and can do us no hurt.” He taught Methodists to die “a good death,” free from fear and facing life’s end “in calm assurance.”

- When we or someone we love faces death, we often use “combat” language, saying things like “she lost the battle.” Paul, quoting the prophet Hosea, denied that death “wins”: “Where is your victory, Death?” (cf. Hosea 13:14) That confidence was central to Wesley’s “good death” idea. For a Christian, death is not a defeat, but a transition into a new phase of our victorious walk with Christ. Does the thought of death cause you fear and anxiety? How can internalizing the meaning of Jesus’ resurrection lead you toward the “calm assurance” Wesley spoke of?
- Death separates us from those who die, and the separation hurts—we miss our loved ones. But in verse 54, Paul said we’ll receive a body that can’t die. Thanks to Jesus’ victorious resurrection, Christians know this separation is only temporary! Christians trust that God will reunite all of God’s children. Have you felt the sting of separation death caus-

es? How does the hope found in Christ's victory over death help you to face the sting of separation from those who die?

**Prayer:** Lord, you went where most of us most dread going—the realm of death—and you emerged victorious! Teach me how to claim your victory, and to live, and die, in the calm assurance of your eternal love and life. Amen.

**SATURDAY 12/1/18 “I will sing praises to my God as long as I live”  
Read Psalm 146:1-2, 5-10**

John Wesley died on March 2, 1791, three months short of his 88th birthday. As his long life ebbed away, Wesley spoke the oft-quoted words of faith: “The best of all is, God is with us.” With his final breaths, he tried to sing Isaac Watts’ hymn, based on Psalm 146: “I’ll praise my Maker while I’ve breath, and when my voice is lost in death, praise shall employ my nobler powers. My days of praise shall ne’er be past, while life, and thought, and being last, or immortality endures.” He modeled the “good death” that he had preached and taught.

- The second stanza of Watts’ hymn further expanded on the themes of Psalm 146: “Happy are they whose hopes rely on Israel’s God, who made the sky and earth and seas, with all their train; whose truth for ever stands secure, who saves th’oppressed and feeds the poor, for none shall find God’s promise vain.” In what ways is it true of you that your hopes rely, not on your own aptitudes, accomplishments or possessions, but on Israel’s God? How can you join the psalmist, Isaac Watts and John Wesley in declaring confidently, “I’ll praise my Maker while I’ve breath”?

**Prayer:** Dear God, you have touched my life, as well as many others, through your work in the life of the psalmist, of Isaac Watts and of John Wesley. In big ways or small, as you choose, use my life, too, as a channel of your grace and blessing in our world. Amen.

**SOMETHING EXTRA: Methodism in America**

In the mid-1700s, the Methodist movement crossed from Great Britain to America, where it spread like wildfire.

In the late 1760s, two Methodist lay preachers emigrated and formed societies in New York and Philadelphia. In 1770, two authorized Methodist preachers arrived from the British Connection, and in 1771, Francis Asbury, having also been appointed by John Wesley as a traveling Methodist preacher, arrived in the colonies, where he ministered to people living mostly on the frontier.

As the Methodist movement in both Britain and America grew, Wesley was constantly pressured to separate the Movement from the Church of England. But Wesley, a devoted Anglican, refused to create a new

and separate church, and remained an Anglican priest until he died.

In the meantime, the colonies became embroiled in a Revolution, which caused many Anglican priests serving in America to board the next boat back to the mother country, leaving their churches without spiritual leadership and without the means to receive the sacraments. This troubled John Wesley greatly, so he commissioned Thomas Coke, an Ordained Anglican Priest, as Superintendent of the American Methodists. Wesley further instructed Thomas Coke to Ordain and Commission Francis Asbury as a second Superintendent, and at the Christmas Conference in 1784, the Methodist Episcopal Church was born. As Superintendents (later known as Bishops), Coke and Asbury were authorized to ordain other preachers, thus giving them the authority to administer the sacraments in their congregations.

Over time, American Methodism grew and spread. Local churches and classes were born wherever a few men and women were gathered under the direction of class leaders and lay preachers. Ordained circuit riders visited regularly, administering the sacraments to the members of their congregations, and the Sunday School movement began to flourish.

In the years that followed, the Methodist Episcopal Church not only grew, it also divided, primarily over social and political issues. In 1828 the Methodist Protestant Church was formed by former members of the Methodist Episcopal Church over disagreements related to doctrine and governance. In 1841, another split related to disagreements over slavery and polity resulted in the creation of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection. And in 1845, delegates from the Methodist churches in the southern states organized into the Methodist Episcopal Church South as a separate denomination.

These three branches of the Methodist Church remained divided until 1939, when an agreement was reached to bring them all back together, and the Methodist Church USA was formed.

In 1951, the Methodist Church USA helped form the World Methodist Council, which joined with the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches, which allowed for greater cooperation in mission and ministry.

In 1956, full clergy rights were granted to women, but it took more than a decade for the number of women in seminaries to increase. And in 1968, the church, which had continued concerns over the issue of racism in both the country and the church, was able to resolve the issue through a merger with the Evangelical United Brethren, and the United Methodist Church,

which ultimately became an international denomination, was born.

In the 1970s, language was inserted into the UMC's Book of Discipline addressing human sexuality, specifically regarding ways in which the church ministers to members of the LGBTQIA community. This debate has created increased conflict within the denomination, and threatens the unity of the church.

Since 2001, the UMC continues to experience change and increasingly knows itself as a world church with members and conferences in Africa, Asia, Europe and the United States. While membership in Europe and the United States has declined, it has grown significantly in Asia and Africa. The church endeavors to become a community in which all people, regardless of racial or ethnic background, can participate in its connectional life and ministry.