

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Practicing Wesleyan-Holiness
Spiritual Formation



SESSION 17

Companions on the Spiritual Journey

NOTICE TO CLT PARTICIPANTS AND EDUCATORS

This is a contract. By using these materials you accept all the terms and conditions of this Agreement. This Agreement covers all Leader's Guides, Student Guides, and instructional resources included in the Continuing Lay Training (CLT) website.

Upon your acceptance of this Agreement, Continuing Lay Training grants to you a nonexclusive license to use these curricular materials provided that you agree to the following:

1. USE OF THE MODULES.

- You may distribute educational materials in electronic form to students or other educational providers.
- You may make and distribute electronic or paper copies to students for the purpose of instruction, as long as each copy contains this Agreement and the same copyright and other proprietary notices pertaining to the Module. If you download the educational materials from the Internet or similar online source, you must include the CLT notice for the Module with any online distribution and on any media you distribute that includes the educational content.
- You may translate, adapt, and/or modify the examples and instructional resources for the purpose of making the instruction culturally relevant to your students. However, you must agree that you will not sell these modified materials without express, written permission from CLT.

2. COPYRIGHT.

The material is owned by CLT and is protected by United States Copyright Law and International Treaty provisions. Except as stated above, this Agreement does not grant you any intellectual property rights in the Module.

3. RESTRICTIONS.

- You may not sell copies of these educational materials in any form except to recover the minimum reproduction cost of electronic media or photocopy expense.
- You may not modify the wording or original intent of the educational material for commercial use.

THANK YOU

Continuing Lay Training would like to thank Clergy Development for granting permission to modify and adapt their course of study materials for our educational purposes. Their willingness to partner with us is sincerely appreciated.

Companions on the Spiritual Journey

SESSION OVERVIEW

**An Introduction to John Wesley's
Face-to-Face Groups**

The Family at Worship: A Face-to-Face Group

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand the insightful and practical use of face-to-face groups in the Wesleyan tradition
- own your need for the encouragement, strengthening, accountability, and growth that comes from face-to-face Christian groups
- experience the small group process and devise ministry strategies employing face-to-face groups as one necessary way the community of faith nurtures the deeper spiritual life

Companions on the Spiritual Journey

INTRODUCTION



Did you ever wonder why wild geese fly in Vs? One scientist did and he attained a US government grant to study the matter. He discovered geese could fly 71 percent farther and longer by flying in Vs. As the geese position themselves in the V formation, the motion of the wings of the goose in front provides an uplift that makes it easier for the following goose to fly. When the lead goose gets tired, it falls out and takes its place at the end of the formation where it is easier to fly. Another goose moves up and leads.

Occasionally, an independent goose strikes out alone, but it soon gives out and has to stop or get hopelessly behind. This obviously puts the goose at great risk. Becoming lost, suffering an injury, or the buckshot of goose hunters hiding in the reeds are all definite possibilities.

Christians are like that too. On our own, we soon grow faint, give in to temptation, or get too discouraged to go on. We really do need each other.

In this session, we will explore the nature and usefulness of face-to-face groups in Christian nurture. We will look at our unusually rich Wesleyan heritage of small-group ministries. We will also evaluate how this heritage can enrich our lives as Christians and the practices of our churches today.

AN INTRODUCTION TO JOHN WESLEY'S FACE-TO-FACE GROUPS



NOTES

No one has yet improved on John Wesley's plan for pastoral care. Its bountiful success in caring for converts, building up believers, and leading Christians into the experience of sanctification demands our attention. Most of the believers who found entire sanctification in Wesley's time did so in a small-group meeting. The spiritual guidance he taught and structured was called Christian Conference. Therein, people experienced mutual spiritual guidance in classes, bands, societies, families, and in twin soul and faith mentoring pairs.

THE SOCIETY

The society in the Methodist Connexion was at first a religious organization within the Church of England. Societies held no meetings or services that would conflict with the Anglican worship schedule. Eventually the society became a sort of local congregation meeting in chapels, halls, and homes.

On Sunday evenings, there was a service of preaching, Scripture reading, exhortations, testimonies, and hymn-sing. The society also had a 5:00 a.m. meeting on a weekday morning. The workday started at 6:00 a.m. so the Methodists went to the factories and the mines armed with a fresh religious experience.

The society also held a joyous watch night service monthly on Saturday night. It came at the full moon so the members would have moonlight by which to walk home. The other meeting was the Love Feast, a service that began with a meal of bread and water, proceeded with opportunities to mend relationships, and ended with testimonies and praise.

THE CLASS MEETING

The Class Meeting has been hailed as Wesley's greatest contribution. D. L. Moody called it "the greatest tool for discipling converts ever devised." *From David Michael Henderson, "John Wesley's Instructional Groups," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1980, 140. From Wesley Tracy, "John Wesley: Architect of Christian Nurture," Herald of Holiness, Feb. 1991, 27.*

The society was subdivided into classes of about 12 persons each. Every member of the society was required to join a class that met weekly. The class meeting was more or less a democratic forum where rich and poor, old and young, the educated, and the illiterate could meet as peers.


NOTES

At first, “class meetings met in homes, shops, school rooms, attics—even coal bins—wherever there was room for ten or twelve people to assemble.” The leadership of classes was open to both genders. “The class meeting was the only significant role of leadership for women in Britain.”

David Michael Henderson calls the class meeting an instructional group. Methodist doctrines and practices, along with the Sunday sermons were explained, but the class was also an arena of true community. Acceptance, love, and mutual commitment were the keynotes.

After an opening hymn, the typical meeting would then see the class leader share the problems and victories in his or her spiritual life. Class members on a voluntary basis, would then follow suit. Answers to prayer, spiritual lessons learned from experience as well as temptations, grief, and backsliding were shared. In this context of prayer, trust, and confession, spiritual growth was accelerated. *From Zion’s Herald, Boston, November 30, 1825. Designated as a reprint from the Arminian Magazine.*

Wesley summarized the function of the classes in the *Arminian Magazine*:

The particular design of the classes is, to know who continue as members of the society; to inspect their outward walking; to inquire into their inward state; to learn what are their trials; and how they fall by or conquer them; to instruct the ignorant in the principles of religion; to repeat, to explain, or enforce . . . what has been said in public preaching. [To insure that] they have a clear, full, abiding conviction, that without inward, complete, universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord.

When the Wesleyan revival jumped the Atlantic and came to America, first, the rampant revivalism and second, the success of the Sunday School shoved the class meeting into the background. Today, what is left of the heritage of the class meeting is expressed in adult Sunday School classes, in small-group Bible studies, and in membership classes.

THE BANDS

The bands were same-gender groups of five or six persons committed to each other and to the holy life. They met to help each other on the road to Christian perfection. These were deeper life groups and only about one-third of the typical society joined, or was invited to join the bands where they shared their spiritual journeys “without reserve and without disguise.” John Wesley called this close conversation.


NOTES

He felt that Methodism was closest to the New Testament ideal in the band meetings. He said he saw one man who learned more about the spiritual life in one band meeting than he had in 10 years of listening to public preaching. *From Wesley, Works, 8:272.*

Before one could join a band, he or she was examined by 11 questions. Five of the eleven questions follow:

1. Have you the forgiveness of sins and peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ?
2. Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit that you are a child of God?
3. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you?
4. Do you desire to be told all your faults?
5. Is it your desire and design to be, on this and on all other occasions, entirely open so as to speak everything that is in your heart without exception, without disguise, and without reserve?

Wesley wrote five starter questions for use in each band meeting.

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret? (not always included in the early Wesleyan accounts of the bands)

Following are the band questions stated in contemporary style more attuned to the spiritual ear of serious Christians today:

1. What spiritual failures have you experienced since our last meeting? What known sins, if any, have you committed?
2. What temptations have you battled with this week? Where do you feel the most vulnerable right now?
3. What temptations have you been delivered from this week? Please share with us how you won the victory. *See Reflecting God, 133.*


NOTES

4. Has the Lord revealed anything to you about your heart and life that makes you want us to join you in taking a second look at what might be sinful attitudes, lifestyle, or motivations?
5. Is there any spiritual problem you have never been able to talk about—to us or even to God?

What Christian could not profit from meeting weekly with trusted friends to share answers to such questions? Too often, we go to church, look at the back of our fellow believers' heads during a public service, and never see into each other's hearts.

The revival and camp meeting emphasis in America diminished the Band Meeting in the 19th and early 20th century. And with the Sunday School then charged with almost all the Christian nurture duties, the ministry of the bands faded.

The genius of the band was rediscovered when covenant groups surged through the religious and secular culture in the last three decades of the 20th century. The Wesleyan and Wesleyan-Holiness groups should have owned the franchise on covenant group work, but they had all but discarded the band ethos in favor of revivalism and Sunday School work.

The Holiness churches had to relearn the covenant and support group ethos by borrowing from the culture and digging into their all but forgotten heritage. Today covenant groups blossom like wisteria on the sunny side of the barn all over the Wesleyan-Holiness Movement.

THE PENITENT BANDS

This backslider's band was designed especially for sincere people who, for some reason, kept being recaptured by sin. They wanted to do right but had not found the strength and discipline to overcome the temptation that persistently caused them to flounder. For them the penitent band met on Saturday nights.

What would happen to the spiritual temperature of our churches if those with persistent spiritual problems and failures could, without disgrace or losing face, go to a regular meeting for people just like them? What a celebration when someone would graduate from the penitent band! *From Wesley, Works, 8:261.*

THE SELECT SOCIETY

The select society was a small group for leaders in the Methodist Connexion. Only the most faithful and dedicated were invited. The Select Society had no rules, no order of service, and no official leader. Even when John Wesley was present, he did not preside.

 **NOTES**

Any topic or concern of the leadership team could be discussed. Wesley's first experiment with this structure aimed at helping them advance in perfection; to help them love each other more; to improve every leadership talent; and "to have a select company, to whom I might unbosom myself on all occasions, without reserve; and whom I could propose to all their brethren as a pattern of love, of holiness, and of good works."

Although there were no rules, there were three directions.

- Everything discussed was to be held in confidence.
- In indifferent matters or opinions regarding non-essentials, members were to abide by the arbitration of the senior minister among them.
- Everyone should give to the common stock of offerings of money and goods for the poor.

This was in harmony with the directive for all Wesleyan small-groups meetings—each group was to give an offering for the poor, every meeting, no exceptions. Today the random church staff meetings, and church board retreats, do not draw on the select society heritage in any direct way.

Consider for a moment what the result of practices would be if they were maintained. Surely many church meetings would be a lot shorter (increased Christian fellowship for all of us!). Even better would be the increase in compassionate ministries through the offerings.

THE FAMILY AT WORSHIP: A FACE-TO-FACE GROUP



NOTES

Historians who write about Wesley's face-to-face groups almost always forget one of the most important groups—the family. Family worship and study was highly recommended twice daily, morning and evening and was one of the engines that fueled the Methodist revival. Besides the twice-daily family worship, Thursday night was to be given to one-on-one parent to child instruction. On Saturday night, the family was to review all they had learned during the week.

To help with the family worship and religious education, Wesley provided *A Collection of Prayers for Families, Prayers and Devotions for Every Day of the Week, Prayers for Children, Sessions for Children* (200 Bible studies), and *Instructions for Children*, 58 sessions on Christian living. To help parents who had little if any experience with such things, Wesley devised an insightful method of family worship:

Step 1: A short extemporaneous or read prayer.

Step 2: Psalm singing.

Step 3: Bible study. A parent was to read the scripture for the day and explain it. Then the children were to explain the Bible passage back to the parents.

Step 4: Family prayer using both written and spontaneous prayers.

Step 5: Singing of the Doxology.

Step 6: The benediction given by a parent.

Step 7: The blessing. The parent lays his or her hand on the head of each child and blesses the child in Jesus' name. The blessing in Jesus' name, Wesley charged, was never to be omitted no matter how bad the child had behaved that day. Being blessed in Jesus' name by a parent every day—even on days when your conduct was rotten! Think what that would do for a child's self-esteem, for their spiritual health. Would not that put you light years ahead of all the advice of Dr. Spock!

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Review the following Service of Family Worship. Record your answers to the following questions and be prepared to discuss the family worship service and your response with your mentor.
 - What would it mean to your life if you had experienced this as a child?
 - Is it something you can incorporate into your life now?
 - How could it be redesigned for those who are not living with immediate family?

A WESLEYAN SERVICE OF FAMILY WORSHIP

Step 1. *Opening Prayer.* Use both extemporary prayer and these words from Wesley's family prayers for Sunday:

“Almighty and eternal God, we desire to praise thy holy name . . . How great was thy love to the sinful sons of men! . . . Compose our spirits to a quiet and steady dependence on thy good providence” (John Wesley's *Prayers*, ed. Frederick C. Gill [New York: Abingdon, 1951], 59, 63).

Step 2. *Psalm Singing.* If psalm singing is too much for your family or group, select a hymn or gospel song rich in devotional content and sing it. If you like the challenge of psalm singing, try this excerpt from Psalm 103:13-14, 17-18, NKJV:

As a father pities his children,
 So the Lord pities them who fear Him.
 For He knows our frame;
 He remembers that we are dust.
 The mercy of the Lord is
 From everlasting to everlasting . . .
 To such as keep His covenant,
 To those who remember His commandments.

Step 3. *Bible Study*

- A. Select a passage for study, or use Psalm 103.
- B. Parents are to explain the passage. Concentrate on the timeless principles. Putting the scriptures on the child's level usually requires advance study by the parent(s). Remember that children deal best with the concrete. Use examples from everyday life.


NOTES

- C. Children are then to explain the passage back to the parents. Thus, the parents have the opportunity and responsibility to guide the child to proper understanding of the Word.

Step 4. *Prayer.* Read one of these prayers used by Wesley (see sample below). Explain the prayer. If there are very young children in your family worship replace the following prayers with simpler ones. After reading the prayer, voice a prayer in your own words.

- A. Almighty God, to whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen (*Book of Common Prayer*).
- B. O Lord, increase in us faith and devotion; give us humility and propriety, patience in adversity, and continual joy in the Holy Spirit. Give us modesty in our countenance, composure in our behavior, wisdom in our speech, holiness in our actions. Let thy mercy cleanse us from all our sins, and confirm us in all righteousness (Steven J. Harper, "The Devotional Life of John Wesley 1703-1725," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1981, 2:258).

Step 5. *Sing the Doxology Together*

Step 6. *The Benediction.* A parent gives a benediction of his or her own, a Bible verse, or the following benediction of Wesley:

Pardon, O gracious Jesus, what we have been,
 With all thy holy discipline correct what we are.
 Order by thy providence what we shall be,
 And in the end crown all thy gifts. Amen (*Prayers*, Gill, 103).

Step 7. *The Blessing*

Each child shall say,
 "Father/Mother bless me in Jesus' name."

Parental response (never to be refused)
 (name of child) I bless you in the name of Jesus who loves you and gave His life for you. May His forgiveness, grace, and peace be yours this day/night, and every day of your life.

This service is adapted from *The Upward Call* (197-199) and used by permission of Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City.


NOTES

2. Write a reflection paper using the following questions as a guide. Be prepared to discuss your paper with your mentor.
- What face-to-face group experience have you experienced in the past year that mirrors one of the early Wesleyan groups?
 - What groups in our church or ministry setting (if any) mirror the early Wesleyan groups?
 - What kind of face-to-face group do new converts need today?
 - When it comes to nurture through community, what does our church do best?
 - The sense of belonging at my church would be improved if I would ____ .
 - If I were to join or start a modern version of a Wesleyan face-to-face group, what would be like?
 - If you were to start a covenant group something like Wesley's bands, around which of the following would you organize it in your church or ministry setting?
 - Bible study
 - Pursuit of holiness
 - Cancer survivors' group
 - Church leadership
 - Prayer group
 - Spiritual fellowship
 - Divorce recovery
 - Doctrinal study
 - Other

JOURNALING

Note: Throughout your work in this module, it is suggested you keep a journal. This is an important tool in the study of spiritual formation. Journaling is a tool to help you slow down in your studies and listen to your heart, soul, mind, and most importantly to God.

Journal your thoughts on the following:

- One thing that scares me about face-to-face groups is . . .
- Two persons I would like to work with in a small group are . . .
- Three things I could get out of an on-going, face-to-face group are . . .

**NOTES****SUGGESTED READING**

- Wesley Tracy, et al., *The Upward Call* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994), 133-62, 193-200.
- Wesley Tracy, et al., *Reflecting God* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City and Christian Holiness Partnership, 2000), 127-134.
- Wesley D. Tracy, "John Wesley, Spiritual Director," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* Vol. 23, Spring-Fall, 1988, 148-62.

EXAM

**NOTES**

1. No one has yet improved on John Wesley's plan for pastoral care.
A. True
B. False
2. The society in the Methodist Connexion started as a break off from the Church of England.
A. True
B. False
3. Every member of a Methodist Society had to participate in a class meeting.
A. True
B. False
4. Family worship and study was highly recommended twice daily.
A. True
B. False
5. The bands were same-gender groups of five or six persons committed to street evangelism.
A. True
B. False
6. John Wesley would always preside when the Select Society would meet.
A. True
B. False
7. All Wesleyan small-groups meetings were to give an offering for the poor.
A. True
B. False
8. An ordained minister could only lead Family Worship.
A. True
B. False
9. The bands were meant to help each other on the road to Christian perfection and almost all of the society was invited to join them.
A. True
B. False

 **NOTES**

10. John Wesley's plan for pastoral care included which of the following _____.
- A. caring for converts
 - B. building up believers
 - C. leading Christians into the experience of sanctification
 - D. all of the above
11. The function and purpose of the "class meeting" was to _____.
- A. inspect their outward walking
 - B. inquire into their inward state
 - C. learn what are their trials
 - D. instruct in the principles of religion
 - E. all of the above
12. Family Worship included _____.
- A. blessings for the children
 - B. punishment for poor behavior
 - C. extended periods of silence
 - D. all of the above

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Review the Service of Family Worship (as presented in this module) with your mentor. Discuss the following:
 - What would it mean to your life if you had experienced this as a child?
 - Is it something you can incorporate into your life now?
 - How could it be redesigned for those who are not living with immediate family?
2. Discuss the reflection paper you wrote that discusses the following:
 - What face-to-face group experience have you experienced in the past year that mirrors one of the early Wesleyan groups?
 - What groups in our church or ministry setting (if any) mirror the early Wesleyan groups?
 - What kind of face-to-face group do new converts need today?
 - When it comes to nurture through community, what does our church do best?
 - The sense of belonging at my church would be improved if I would ____.
 - If I were to join or start a modern version of a Wesleyan face-to-face group, what would be like?
 - If you were to start a covenant group something like Wesley's bands, around which of the following would you organize it in your church or ministry setting?
 - Bible study
 - Pursuit of holiness
 - Cancer survivors' group
 - Church leadership
 - Prayer group
 - Spiritual fellowship
 - Divorce recovery
 - Doctrinal study
 - Other