

THE  
DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

Practicing Wesleyan-Holiness  
Spiritual Formation



**SESSION 20**

Wesleyan-Holiness Spirituality: An Overview

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# Wesleyan-Holiness Spirituality: An Overview

## SESSION OVERVIEW

### Rule of Life

### The Shape of Wesleyan-Holiness Spiritual Theology for Today

### Application

### Exam

### Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- develop a rule of life
- step back and take a wide-angled view of Wesleyan spiritual theology as it has unfolded during the course and as it is summarized and evaluated in today's session
- appreciate the big picture of this course and embrace the progress made in your spiritual journey
- implement the ideas and insights of this session by way of intelligent discussion and planning
- make an objective evaluation of this module and the academic and spiritual exercises it provided

# Wesleyan-Holiness Spirituality: An Overview

## INTRODUCTION

Christ is risen from the dead!  
Dying, he conquered death!  
To the dead, he has given life!  
(*Early Church liturgy*)

A life offered in the name of Christ is one characterized by health. A healthy baby grows in body, mind, and spirit, sometimes called the ability to thrive. As surely as we are tending to the nutrients provided by the spiritual disciplines, we too should show signs of growth and thriving. We may not characterize ourselves as patient. Yet if we have been making our lives available to the transforming grace of God there should be signs of growth in our patience.

A thorough review of all the spiritual disciplines can be overwhelming. None of us will be able to give ourselves high scores on every practice. However, we can prayerfully begin to create a plan of action that will help us grow deeper in our life with God, a life that gives testimony to Christ's resurrection.

Whenever a study of spiritual formation is offered, there can be several responses. One is excitement over new insights into ways we can make our lives more available to God's transforming grace. Another is weariness over the sense there is now more guilt over things left undone.

In this closing session, you will explore how to move practically from reaction to action. You will summarize the teachings of the course in terms of spiritual theology. This is a bit technical, and you will need to think in theological terms about Wesleyan spirituality. Finally, you will have a chance to look over this course and evaluate the contents, materials, and the academic and the spiritual experiences.

## RULE OF LIFE



### NOTES

“As our lives and faith progress, the heart expands, and with the sweetness of love we move down the paths of God’s commandments. Never departing from His guidance . . . we patiently share in Christ’s passion, so we may eventually enter into the Kingdom of God.” *The Rule of Saint Benedict as quoted in Soul Feast*, Marjorie Thompson, 135.

The practice of creating a rule of life has been part of the Christian experience for centuries. It is creating the life structure that supports spiritual growth. The patterns you create will be daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly. For example, you may commit your self to a certain amount of time for prayer every day but only commit to a prayer retreat once a year.

The final integration of this course is the creation of a plan. Given the varied areas of spiritual disciplines studied, it is clear you cannot tackle them all with any depth. Therefore, it is a prayerful decision regarding the place you will create for this next season in your life. The following questions can be helpful as you consider incorporating new disciplines. *From Soul Feast*, Marjorie Thompson, 142.

- What spiritual disciplines am I deeply attracted to and why?
- Where do I feel God is calling me to stretch and grow?
- What kind of balance do I need in my life?

Like an athlete, our participation in these disciplines will take time and training. We will need to develop prayer muscles. This will include stretching our prayer muscles as well as lifting heavier weights than we have in the past. There will be times when we see the benefits of the disciplines and other times when we are just plain sore.

Ultimately, the rule of life is to help us grow into holiness. We will not know all God desires to do in and through us without creating the spaces and places for God to work. A rule of life is a purposeful plan to grow in Christ. As always this growth is God’s work of grace not our work. Nonetheless, the disciplines are time-tested ways in which you make yourself more available to God’s presence.

The final application is the creation of a rule of life. You are asked to make a plan for six months. This will give you enough time to try some new areas of discipline. You do not want to abandon this new experience without giving it some time to

 **NOTES**

take root. This also helps you to assess at regular intervals how well you are being spiritually formed into the likeness of Christ. We all have shifting life realities and accommodations that need to be made for those changes. For example, you may develop a different rule of life for the summer if you have children who are home from school.

The rule of life is meant to be a tool that gives you freedom to grow. It is not meant as a rigid jail. Yet without a concrete plan, we would never push ourselves to consider new ways through which we may hear God's voice.

## THE SHAPE OF WESLEYAN-HOLINESS SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY FOR TODAY



### NOTES

A Wesleyan-Holiness spirituality should build on the Wesleyan appreciation of revelation (Bible), reason, tradition, and experience as it expresses the Wesleyan spirit in relation to the following characteristics.

#### A GRACIOUS PRINCIPLE

Grace—prevenient, atoning, saving, sanctifying, perfecting grace—is foundational to Wesleyan thought. No one within the movement would ever dream of basing the forgiveness of sins upon anything except the free grace of God expressed in the redemptive work of Christ.

God's initiative makes possible human response to divine grace. Salvation is never *attained*, but *obtained* by grace alone. The practices of spiritual disciplines are always a response to God's amazing grace.

#### SALVATION IS THE AIM

Wesleyan-Holiness soteriology (understanding of salvation) is not about mental health, psychological adjustment, or shallow activism. It is rather a full salvation from sin and restoration of Christlikeness. We need look no farther than the newscast or our own hearts to know that something has gone terribly wrong with the human enterprise. Sin is its Bible name, and Wesleyan soteriology is dealing with the sin problem at a profound, not surface, level. Wesley said:

“By salvation I mean, not barely . . . deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.”

#### A SPIRITUALITY OF RADICAL OPTIMISM

The Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification is radically more optimistic than scientific behaviorism, determinism, Freudian psychology, stimulus-response, and conditioning education—and much more optimistic than classic Protestantism. The social sciences dismiss the idea of sin. Classic Protestantism—Luther and Calvin—declares that inner sin will plague the believer as long as he or she lives.


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The optimism of Wesleyan-Holiness teaching is deliverance from all sin. They believe the Bible is serious when it says the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin and the Holy Spirit purifies hearts by faith (1 John 1 and Acts 8). *From Sermons on Several Occasions, (London: Wesleyan- Methodist Book Room, n. d.), 549.*

### **WESLEYANISM HAS AN ECUMENICAL SPIRIT**

What Christians have in common in Christ is more important than our denominational differences. Wesley urges, in his sermon *The Catholic Spirit*, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?” *From “The Nature of Wesleyan Theology,” Wesleyan Theological Journal, 17, No. 2 (Fall 1982): 48, 50.*

### **A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION**

The Wesleyan use of the Bible is wide-scoped and tries to deal with the general tenor of Scripture and not proof texts collected to make a point. J. Kenneth Grider declares, “Wesleyan theology is biblical, but not narrowly so . . . It views Scripture through its wide-angle lens . . . as it applies Scripture to a given time . . . and culture . . . after making allowances for the differences between Bible times and our own.” *From Albert Outler, Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit, (Nashville: Tidings, 1975), 45.*

### **A CHRIST-CENTERED FOCUS**

Jesus Christ, the crucified, resurrected Redeemer, is at the heart of Wesleyan spirituality. The Holy Spirit is commonly referred to as the Holy Spirit of Christ—the two are inseparable. For a time some branches of the Holiness Movement drifted into a fascination of spiritual phenomena with unhappy results. “In a hundred different ways on a thousand different occasions, decade after five decades, his [Wesley’s] message was . . . *Christus crucifixus, Christus redemptor, Christus victor.*” Christ crucified, Christ redeemer, Christ victorious.

### **A SYNTHETIC METHOD**

The Wesleyan spiritual journey is guided by revelation, reason, tradition, and experience (the Wesleyan quadrilateral). Wesley’s theological method was synthetic. That is, he borrowed truth and insights wherever he might find them and braided them into a practical theology. Thus, it was nonsectarian in nature. He did not mind borrowing from the best thinkers of history whether they be Greek fathers, English ethicists, or German pietists. *From Grider, WTJ, 51.*


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## A DYNAMIC CHARACTER

Though the Bible is complete, the Holy Spirit of Christ continues to reveal insights to pastors, leaders, and individual Christians about how and what to do in new life settings and situations. Further, the enemies of the faith mount newly aimed opposition movements.

When New Age notions blossom, when UFO cults, Islamic fundamentalists, same sex marriage devotees, and cloning issues crest like ocean waves, theology cannot just repeat the same old things that served as guideposts when the Crusades or the budding missionary movement held sway. Theology must respond to what scientists are doing in outer space and to what psychiatrists are doing in inner space. Thus, Wesleyan theology is always on the grow. No final Wesleyan-Holiness theology will be found that will speak to all situations in ironclad finality. *From "For the Anniversary of One's Conversion," quoted by Henry Bett, The Spirit of Methodism (London: Epworth Press, 1937), 26.*

## HIGHLY VALUES SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

In Wesleyan-Holiness churches, the requirement for membership is not reciting the catechism but testifying to an experience of conversion. Wesleyan-Holiness spirituality takes seriously the witness of assurance of the Spirit, God's Spirit witnessing with our spirit that we are children of God.

This emphasis on experience and heartfelt religion means Wesleyan educators take seriously the realm of the emotions, attitudes, and values. Charles Wesley wrote:

I felt my Lord's atoning blood  
Close to my soul applied;  
Me, me, He loved—the Son of God  
For me, for me, He died.

## WESLEYAN-HOLINESS SPIRITUALITY VALUES CHRISTIAN ETHICS

The moral and ethical agenda appropriate for Christlike believers is highly regarded. Wesleyan spirituality is not designed for the hermit, the lonely ascetic fighting evil spirits in the desert sun. Rather it is spirituality for the "crowded ways of life." How we conduct ourselves in community does affect others.

 **NOTES****WESLEYAN SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY HAS A MAGNETIC ATTRACTION TO THE POOR AND OPPRESSED**

Private piety that clings to Jesus and ignores the human agonies of the world is foreign to the Wesleyan spirit. As already demonstrated in this course, service to the poor, sick, and oppressed is as much a spiritual discipline as prayer to those who breathe the Wesleyan spirit.

**MUTUAL GUIDANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND ENCOURAGEMENT THROUGH SMALL GROUPS**

Christian Conference, as Wesley called it, “is an essential part of the genius of the Wesleyan movement. God has given us to each other to strengthen each other’s hands,” Wesley taught. No spirituality can claim to be truly Wesleyan without this important emphasis.

**THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY**

The church is not isolated individual Christians, but the community of faith is the new temple of the Lord. Wesley said the only holiness he knew was social holiness. That is to say, worship and the spiritual life are matters of community, the church community, the Christian family, and the larger community in the world. *From Works, 8:352.*

**PRAYER, MEDITATION, AND DEVOTIONAL READING**

These are always stressed in a truly Wesleyan spirituality. Wesley promoted private and public prayer and prayer meetings. He practiced and taught the use of written and extemporaneous prayer in private devotion and corporate worship. *From Works, 7:286.*

**CHRISTIAN SERVICE IS AN ESSENTIAL SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE**

John Wesley declared that Christianity brought with it a “hungering and thirsting to do good of every possible kind.” He believed all Methodists wanted to “feed the hungry, cover the naked with a garment and give the poor a way of supplying their own wants for the time to come.” Living for others is the self-transcendence of Wesleyan-Holiness spirituality.

**SELF-EXAMINATION AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE**

These are important elements in Wesleyan spirituality. “Know your disease; know your cure,” Wesley often said.

 **NOTES****SELF-SURRENDER AND SELF-TRANSCENDENCE  
THE KEY TO HOLY LIVING**

The secret to the holy life is self-surrender, always has been, always will be. Wesley carefully taught full surrender, but not the destruction of the personality. God is not at war with our humanity. We surrender to His redeeming love; we do not try to give up being a self, a person.

**PURE HEARTS, ATTITUDES, AND MOTIVES**

Wesley sought purity of intention, knowing perfect performance was beyond all members of our fallen race. But the springs of the heart can be made pure and made to flow as a pure stream as far as intention, motive, and attitude are concerned.

**DETACHMENT FROM THE WORLD**

Upward mobility is a religion for sinners. The theology of prosperity is the radical opposite of the Wesleyan ethos. We worship, love, and serve not the created, but the Creator.

**HOLINESS, CHRISTIAN PERFECTION AS LOVE**

Love is the essence of the holiness Wesley taught. Not legalism or doctrinaire orthodoxy, but rather to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself is the path toward Christian perfection.

## APPLICATION



### NOTES

1. Reflection: Consider the following and write down your response. Be prepared to share your reflections with your mentor.
  - In terms of spiritual formation and Christian nurture, the most Wesleyan thing that happens in the church I attend is . . .
  - The best idea about spiritual formation and the holy life that came to my mind during this lecture was . . .
  - One idea in the session that I want to know more about is . . .
  - Evaluate the theme of Radical Optimism as a distinctive element of Wesleyan spirituality.
  - After considering the elements in Wesleyan spirituality, what part of it is the hardest for you to maintain in your own personal, devotional life? In your church?
2. Use the following information to create a personal Rule of Life. Review it yearly.

#### *Creating a Rule of Life*

Begin with writing your reaction to three basic questions:

- What spiritual disciplines am I deeply attracted to and why?
- Where do I feel God is calling me to stretch and grow?
- What kind of balance do I need in my life?

#### *Name Goals and Plan for Implementation*

- Keep a copy in a place for regular review.
- Choose a person or persons to whom you will be accountable.
- Name at least five spiritual disciplines you would like to introduce or deepen in your life over the next six months. Consider practically how they might be incorporated in your schedule.
- Determine how accountability will take place.
- Set a date on your calendar in six months to review and revise your rule of life.

**NOTES****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.

Reflect on Philippians 3:10, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection.”

**SUGGESTED READING**

- J. Kenneth Grider, “The Nature of Wesleyan Theology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 17, no. 2 (Fall, 1982): 41-60.
- David L. McKenna, *What a Time to Be Wesleyan!* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1999), 11-152.
- Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 137-146.
- Wesley Tracy, et al., *Reflecting God* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City and Christian Holiness Partnership, 2000), 171-79.
- Morris Weigelt and E. Dee Freeborn, *The Lord’s Prayer: Design for Spiritual Formation* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2001).
- John Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation” in *Wesley’s Fifty-Three Sermons*, Edward H. Sugden, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 721-33.
- Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1972), 21-164.

## EXAM



### NOTES

1. The practice of creating a rule of life has been part of the Christian experience for centuries.
  - A. True
  - B. False
2. A rule of life is a rigid system that will be the same for all Christians.
  - A. True
  - B. False
3. Ultimately, the rule of life is to help us recognize our deficiencies.
  - A. True
  - B. False
4. Grace—prevenient, atoning, saving, sanctifying, perfecting grace—is foundational to Wesleyan thought.
  - A. True
  - B. False
5. The Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification is radically optimistic.
  - A. True
  - B. False
6. Love is the essence of the holiness that Wesley taught.
  - A. True
  - B. False
7. Salvation is to be attained.
  - A. True
  - B. False
8. The secret to the holy life is self-surrender.
  - A. True
  - B. False
9. Service to the poor, sick, and oppressed is as much a spiritual discipline as prayer.
  - A. True
  - B. False



10. Wesleyan-Holiness spirituality does not take seriously the witness of assurance of the Spirit.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
11. We worship, love, and serve not the created, but the Creator.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
12. By salvation we mean \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. a present deliverance from sin
  - B. a restoration of the soul to its primitive health
  - C. a recovery of the divine nature
  - D. all of the above

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Share the reflections you recorded in the Application section of this session with your mentor.
2. Review your Rule of Life with your mentor.