

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Practicing Wesleyan-Holiness
Spiritual Formation



SESSION 8
Sanctifying Grace:
The Transforming Moment

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Sanctifying Grace: The Transforming Moment

SESSION OVERVIEW

The Transforming Moment of Sanctification

Steps Toward the Transforming Moment of Sanctification

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- learned to define and explain the key concepts of sanctification as a transforming moment as taught by the Bible, the Wesleyan tradition, and by the experience of God's people
- hungered for sanctifying grace or for progress in holiness
- followed steps toward sanctification if you have not already experienced the transforming moment or sanctifying grace and/or demonstrate your hunger for sanctification and the deeper spiritual life

Sanctifying Grace: The Transforming Moment

INTRODUCTION

The goal of sanctifying grace is: “Love the Lord with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind And love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37).

This kind of love is exemplified in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. . . If I . . . have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:4-7, 1).

Those who complicate the doctrine of sanctification or reduce it to a lockstep formula should read the following words of John Wesley more than once:

The “heaven of heavens is love.” There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love you are looking wide of the mark . . . And when you are asking others, “Have you received this or that blessing?” if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them on a false scent. Settle it in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of that love described in the thirteenth [chapter] of Corinthians. You can go no higher than this. *John Wesley, Works, 11:430*

The aim of God in sanctification is to make you all love. That is to say, to make you more like God who is holy love. Sanctification has two dimensions—a transforming moment in which inbred sin is cleansed and the heart is filled with the Holy Spirit of love and an ongoing, lifelong journey of transformation by which we are changed more and more into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). The holiness people have correctly testified, “I am sanctified and I am being sanctified.” This module will focus on the transforming moment of sanctifying grace life.

THE TRANSFORMING MOMENT OF SANCTIFICATION

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A new start with a new heart—what could be better. You are a living miracle already. But just when you think it doesn't get any better than this it does. You discover that the transformation you experienced when you were born again continues. Negative memories are being healed, old resentments are melting away. And you find yourself hungering for more and more of God. This is the Holy Spirit calling you to the blessing of sanctification.

God has made it His aim to make of you a Christian who is accurately described by Matt. 22:37, 1 Cor.13, and Matt. 5–7 (The Sermon on the Mount). God's aim is to make you like himself—all holy love.

- God calls us to sanctified lives. “The God of peace [wants to] sanctify you through and through” (1 Thess. 5:23).
- God wants to drench you in love and set you apart for holy use. This is His loving will for every believer. “It is God's will that you should be sanctified . . . For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thess. 4:3, 7).

HOW DO WE GET THERE FROM HERE?

How does the believer move toward the transforming moment of sanctification? It isn't done by magic, or by rigid formula. It is not easy, for it includes crucifixion of the sinful self and a forsaking of egocentricity in favor of Christ-centered existence.

THE REALITY OF THE TRANSFORMING MOMENT OF SANCTIFICATION

The Scriptures speak of the act of sanctification (Acts 15:8-9) and the journey of sanctification (2 Cor. 3:18). But often the Scriptures do not directly differentiate between the two aspects of sanctification. It is the experiences of God's people through the centuries that make us expect that God will cleanse our hearts and fill us with the Holy Spirit. This experience once and for all puts Christ on the throne at the center of our being.

The 100 or more denominations in the Wesleyan- Holiness tradition didn't make up a second work of grace. We have simply observed that generally this is the way God works in setting us free from inner sin. John Wesley, over a period of some three years, personally interviewed some 1,000 persons who had found the deeper life of holiness. This is what he found:


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Every one of them was exceeding clear in their experience. Every one (after the most careful inquiry) I have not found one exception . . . has declared that his deliverance from sin [entire sanctification] was instantaneous; that the change was wrought in a moment. Had half of these, or one-third, or one in twenty declared it was gradually wrought in them, I would have believed this in regard to them, and thought that some were gradually sanctified and some instantaneously. . . But as I have not found, in so long a space of time, a single person speaking thus: as all who believe they are sanctified declare with one voice that the change was wrought in a moment. I cannot but believe that sanctification is commonly, if not always, an instantaneous work. From "On Patience," *Works*, 6:49

In his classic, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, John Wesley said:

Beyond all possibility of exception . . . my brother and I maintained . . . That this [sanctification] is received merely by faith . . . given instantaneously, in one moment. . . There is a gradual work of God in the soul . . . generally speaking; it is a long time . . . before sin is destroyed. There is a gradual work both before and after that moment [of sanctification].

The saints in every age have reported a crisis experience of God after conversion that ushered them into the deeper life. The testimony of Billy Graham and of Lloyd Ogilvie come to mind among contemporary well-known Christians who long after conversion found a place of utter consecration that led to a pivotal deeper experience of God.

For more on the scriptural teaching on the instantaneous nature of sanctification, see *John A. Knight, All Loves Excelling*, 108-112.

THE PROBLEM OF INNER SIN AND THE NEED FOR CLEANSING

One thing that prevents many believers from finding the deeper life is remaining inner sin. As you follow the Spirit into the sunrise of sanctifying grace you become more aware of the love and holiness of God. The closer you get to Him, the more your own lack of love and your own unholy attitudes and feelings show up.

Though you have been born again—given a new start with a new heart—and though you have renounced the acts of sin that characterized your former life, you are now forced to admit that though sin does not rule in your heart it does remain. *From Reflecting God*, 79.


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Inward sin is not something you have; it is something you are. You grieve, for at the deepest level you want to be like Christ. But there's a part of you that treasures lust, or harbors a lurking self-idolatry, or nourishes the need to control, or thirsts for praise, or protects a touchy ego, or affirms a cultural prejudice, or shelters unworthy motives, or rebels against continual obedience to God. A. W. Tozer called these "the hyphenated sins of the human spirit." He named some: "self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, self-love, self-pity, and self-admiration."

The Spirit of the Lord is both tender and firm. Faithfully, He confronts you with your sinful nature. At first, you may dismiss His gentle revelations. But He keeps bringing you back to the mirror of the divine Light where you can admit you need to have your inmost heart cleansed of sin. You find yourself ready to pray the Wesley hymn, "Show me as my soul can bear the depth of inbred sin."

If you pray such a prayer, tighten your spiritual seat belt. You may be in for a jolting ride through some sin-stained slums of your inner world that are as ugly as sin. You must be willing to look at areas of our life that can be difficult. It takes courage to look unflinchingly at your own sin. You may need to confess your honest unwillingness to look, with a request for God's Spirit to not only open your eyes but keep them open.

When that happens do not "cast away your confidence" (Heb. 10:35, NKJV). Rather, wrap the robe of faith around you and hold on to God. Think of the wonderful things God has already done in giving you a new start with a new heart. Do not despair over what God has not yet done for you.

You have been born again. To that truth the Spirit bears witness, as does your changed life. Take comfort in these facts. One of Satan's devices is to bully the believer on the way to sanctification until he or she despairs over remaining sin rather than praise God for the regeneration miracle He has already wrought. The Spirit will gently lead you to loving submission to God so you can be cleansed "from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Cor. 7:1).

THE NEED FOR SELF-SURRENDER

The key to the deeper life of holiness is self-surrender. The sinful self must be crucified with Christ (Rom. 6:6). This is a truth verified by 20 centuries of Christian discipleship. Those who have experienced it call it self-denial, self-transcendence, self-crucifixion, self-surrender, or, as the saints of the Middle Ages called it, self-donation.


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One researcher reports a study of 200 of the best-known works on Christian spirituality produced over the last 20 centuries. A common denominator showed up in the experience and writing of the pilgrims in the works studied—self-surrenders. This was the case whether the author was a liberal or conservative, modern or ancient, Catholic or Protestant. One woman’s 1112- page Ph.D. dissertation summed it up: “The secret to the holy life is self-surrender, always has been, always will be.” *“Open, Lord, My Inward Ear,” Wesley Hymns (Kansas City: Lillenas, 1982), 37.*

No one seems to say it better than our hymn writers.

Charles Wesley

Show me as my soul can bear The depth of inbred sin;
All the unbelief declare, The pride that lurks within
Take me whom Thyself hast bought, Bring into captivity
Every high aspiring thought That would not bow to Thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal

Take my will and make it Thine—It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart—it is Thine own; It shall be Thy royal throne.
Take my love—my Lord I pour, At Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself and I will be Ever, only, all for Thee.
“Take My Life and Let It Be”: Sing to the Lord, 455.

Perhaps you will like this one transliterated from the Pidgin English of the hymnal used by Christians in Papua New Guinea. It has no title; just hymn 119 but is to be sung to the tune of “Have Thine Own Way Lord.”

You boss me, God, You boss me.
You are the Papa me pickinini (child).
Suppose me got sin you straighten me.
Me cry long [to] you, you come boss me.
Wewak, Papua New Guinea Christian Books, Melanesia, 1979.

STEPS TOWARD THE TRANSFORMING MOMENT OF SANCTIFICATION



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With care not to reduce to a dead formula or a code, consider the steps that have led many to the deeper life of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you (Acts 2:38-39).

Know that God calls you to sanctification. “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified” (1 Thess. 4:3). “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through . . . The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it” (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

Invite God to prepare your heart. The Holy Spirit will faithfully lead you to see the depths of inbred sin—that inward sinfulness that wars against the soul even after acts of sin have been forgiven. God will use the deep hunger of your own heart to lead you toward the Light. Yield every sinful attachment that the Spirit points out. When you reach the point where you love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, expect sanctifying grace that cleanses the heart and fills you with the loving Spirit. The promise is sure. “If we walk in the light . . . the blood of Jesus . . . purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Make your consecration complete. Make loving submission to Christ a priority. Withhold no secret sin, no dream, or ambition. All must go on the altar of consecration. True, God may give you back the noblest of your dreams or aspirations, but you must not cling to them now.

Expect sanctifying grace instantaneously by faith. You have been growing both in and toward holiness. As the Spirit leads you to say the ultimate “yes” to God, expectantly hope for that moment when He says the second time “Be clean.” Remember, you cannot earn, demand, or bargain for sanctifying grace, it is a gift that He has promised to you. In His own time, He will bestow the purging fire and the fullness of the Spirit.

Patiently follow the hunger of your soul. If you follow the deepest hunger of your heart, God will lead you into sanctifying grace. Seek with your whole heart, without fretting or tormenting yourself. Resist the efforts of zealous people to get you to claim the blessing too soon. You can trust God to give you just what you need from Him. He died to make your sanctification possible. He prayed for your sanctification (John 17). It is His will. He calls you to holiness, and the Faithful One will deliver what He promises. Wait patiently for Him.


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In faith believing, accept God's gracious gift of the fullness of the Spirit. Exercise your faith in your Savior who has already saved you from the guilt and power of sin. Now when He calls you to another level of Sonship, trust in Him, lean all your weight upon Him. He alone is able to bring about the transformation.

This guide to sanctifying grace is adapted from Reflecting God, 90-9. Used by permission of Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City.

A prayer for sanctifying grace. If you are already a believer, and if you feel led by the Spirit to do so, make this prayer your own.

Oh God, I praise You for all that You have done for me and my brothers and sisters in Christ. Holy is Your name! I now open my heart to its depths before You. Cleanse by the fire of Your Spirit anything that is unlike Christ. Purge my attitudes, my spirit, and my affections. Consume all my sinfulness. Fill me with Your love until I love even those who persecute or mistreat me. Make me a flame of holy love. Take all that is mine—I hold nothing back. I claim no right to my wealth, position, or reputation. I give You my body, my soul, my freedom, and my life. Do with me as You wish. I wish only to know You better and to serve You better all the days of my life. If in Your sovereign will I am ready to receive full sanctification, please bestow that gift on my unworthy heart. If the time is not yet, if there is work yet to be done to prepare me for the fullness of the Spirit, then Lord, help me to wait patiently and give me eyes to see what You are teaching me in order to prepare my heart. Thank You, Lord, for hearing my prayer. Amen.

CLOSING THOUGHT

Make this prayer from John Wesley's hand-written prayer journal your own prayer of loving submission:

O Lord Jesus, I give thee my body, my soul, my substance [wealth], my fame, my friends, my liberty, and my life: dispose of me and all that is mine as it seems best to thee. I am now not mine, but thine: therefore claim me as thy right, Keep me as thy charge, and love me as thy child. Fight for me when I am assaulted, heal me when I am wounded, and revive me when I am destroyed. Amen.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Do an in-depth Bible study of two of the following passages.

- The Journey of Abraham, Genesis 12-23; 25:1-11
- The Journey of Joseph, Genesis 37, 39-50
- The Journey of Jonah, Jonah 1-4
- The Journey of Moses, Exodus 1-24

Read these life stories as journeys, as quests, as life stories about what really matters. Be prepared to share your work with your mentor. Note such things as:

- character development
- triumphs and failures
- spiritual sessions learned
- spiritual refinement at work
- the purpose of God at work when the character may not have been aware of it

2. Make a Lifeline Chart of one of the characters of the Bible study you completed. Show the events in his life and the spiritual ups and downs. Be prepared to share your work with your mentor.

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.

- Record your thoughts and feelings about the following:
- When it comes to being all love, holy love I find myself . . .
- My own prayer of consecration is . . .
- My deepest hungers are . . .
- The most recent time I prayed with someone who was seeking sanctifying grace was . . .

NOTES**SUGGESTED READING**

- John A. Knight, *All Loves Excelling* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1995), 108-144.
- Wesley Tracy et al., *The Upward Call* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994), 39-47.
- Wesley Tracy, et al., *Reflecting God*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City and Christian Holiness Partnership, 2000), 77-92.
- Wes Tracy, *Reflecting God Workbook*, 51-58.
- John Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," Works, 6:43-53.
- John Wesley, "On Patience," Works, 6:484-492.
- John Wesley, "Satan's Devices," Works, 6:32-42.

EXAM

**NOTES**

1. The aim of God in sanctification is to make us all love.
A. True
B. False
2. Sanctification has one dimension, a process of change.
A. True
B. False
3. God's aim is to make you like himself—all holy love.
A. True
B. False
4. The key to the deeper life of holiness is self-righteousness.
A. True
B. False
5. What most hinders believers from finding the deeper life is their outward sinning.
A. True
B. False
6. Inward sin is something one has, not something one is.
A. True
B. False
7. God confronts us with our sinful nature.
A. True
B. False
8. It is necessary to submit one's dreams and ambitions in order to make consecration complete.
A. True
B. False
9. It is inaccurate for someone to claim they are both sanctified and being sanctified.
A. True
B. False

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10. Wesley describes sanctification as “an instantaneous work.”
 - A. True
 - B. False

11. The reason sanctification is necessary is the problem of inner sin and the need for cleansing.
 - A. True
 - B. False

12. One of the following is NOT something A. W. Tozer called “the hyphenated sins of the human spirit.”
 - A. self-sufficiency
 - B. self-surrender
 - C. self-righteousness
 - D. self-pity

13. What common denominator did a researcher find in the 200 best-known works on Christian spirituality within the last 20 centuries?
 - A. controlling one’s emotions as vital to sanctification
 - B. living a life without mistakes as vital to sanctification
 - C. living a life of continual grieving over past sins as vital to sanctification
 - D. living a life of self-surrender as vital to sanctification

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



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Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Discuss with your mentor the testimony that a person is both sanctified and being sanctified. What does that mean?
2. Review with your mentor the steps toward the transforming moment of sanctification listed in the module. Talk about any questions you may have had. Discuss your reaction to the prayer for sanctifying grace.
3. Share one of the life biblical life stories you researched. Talk about how their journey influenced your journey.
4. Review the “ups and downs” you recorded on the Lifeline Chart. Has your “lifeline” had similar ups and downs? Discuss this with your mentor.