

THE  
DISCIPLESHIP  
PLACE

Exploring John Wesley's Theology



**SESSION 15**  
Life in the World

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## PRINCIPAL CONTRIBUTOR

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**NOTES**

The principal contributor for this module is Dr. Diane Leclerc. Dr. Leclerc is professor of Historical Theology and Homiletics at Northwest Nazarene University where she has taught since 1998. She is an ordained clergy in the Church of the Nazarene and has pastored two congregations, in Maine and in Idaho. She received a Bachelor of Arts in religion from Eastern Nazarene College, a Master of Divinity degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary, and both her Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from Drew University.

She has published articles in the Wesleyan Theological Journal and has contributed to two books, including *Heart Religion in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*. Her full-length book, *Singleness of Heart: Gender, Sin, and Holiness in Historical Respective*, won the Wesleyan Theological Society Book of the Year Award in 2002. Leclerc is an active member of the Wesleyan Theological Society and the Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy Association. She resides in Nampa, Idaho, with her husband and son.

## Life in the World

### SESSION OVERVIEW

**Life in the World**

**Wesley on Evangelism**

**Wesley on Compassionate Ministry**

**Wesley on Social Justice**

**Wesley and Liberation Theology**

**Application**

**Exam**

**Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

### LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- understand how mission flows naturally from Wesley's soteriology.
- appreciate how prevenient grace affects evangelism.
- relate Wesley's practice of acts of mercy with contemporary opportunities for compassionate ministry.
- recognize the implications of Wesleyanism for social justice.
- relate Wesleyan theology to liberation theology.

### INTRODUCTION

Wesley would fly away from the prosperous in order to minister to the poor. Thus Wesley could say to his critics: "The honourable, the great, we are thoroughly willing to leave to you. Only let us alone with the poor, the vulgar, the base, the outcasts of men" (*A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Works 8:239).

## LIFE IN THE WORLD



### NOTES

As we have seen, Wesleyanism is thoroughly optimistic. Those who hold to Wesleyan theology hold to a belief in God that emphasizes the depth and breadth of His love for all of humanity. It emphasizes that God's grace can truly transform an individual from the inside out and true sanctification is possible in this life; it believes in the growth and maturity that can come from spiritual formation and the means of grace; it believes in the community of faith as a place where love is genuinely expressed and needs are truly met through mutual accountability and acceptance. Wesleyan theology is optimistic, intensely optimistic, not only about individual transformation but also social transformation; about the difference perfect love can make, not only in the individual's life and in the Church but also in the world.

Every aspect of Wesley's relentless focus on an individual's holiness was for the purpose of making that individual an agent of perfect love to those around him or her. Inward transformation, if it were real and sustained, necessarily led to what Wesley would call "acts of mercy." As he is so often quoted to say, "there is no holiness but social holiness."

The instruction and advice to carry out particular acts of service in the world spread through the culture of Methodism not only in the time of Wesley but also in the next century and beyond. Scholars now recognize that well before what is known as the social gospel movement of the early 20th century—a movement associated with liberal Protestantism—Methodism and the Holiness Movement of the late 19th century in particular evangelized the downcast, assisted the needy, ministered to the sick, fed the poor, advocated for the oppressed, and sought liberation for slaves and women all in the name of perfect love for God and neighbor.

For our purposes here, we will delineate those acts into evangelism, compassionate ministry, social justice, and liberation. It is not coincidental we end with this session, for the totality of Wesleyan theology drives toward touching real lives with real love.

## WESLEY ON EVANGELISM



### NOTES

It is fair to wonder: if Wesley had not been barred from Anglican pulpits, would he have ever moved to preaching in the fields, with the world as his parish? What we can be sure of is after 1738 and Aldersgate, Wesley saw the necessity of preaching salvation and its assurance. In most respects, he absolutely lined up with the great revivalists of his age, including Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. He called persons to faith in Jesus Christ. His is, without a doubt, an evangelical call to new birth and new creation. He told his lay preachers:

You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always, not only to those that want you, but to those that want you most. Observe: It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance. (“Minutes of Several Conversations,” *Works*, Jackson, 8:310).

But unlike his Calvinist contemporaries, Wesley’s understanding of salvation represents a broader, more holistic view:

By salvation I mean, not barely, according to the vulgar notion, 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 Further Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” *Works*, Jackson, 8:47).

Evangelism, for Wesley, must lead to placing a new believer into a method of spiritual formation if its results are to be lasting. The genius of Methodism, and that for which its significant and lasting growth can be attributed, is small groups—bands and classes—that connected newly confessing Christians to the means of spiritual growth.



## WESLEY ON COMPASSIONATE MINISTRY

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### NOTES

There is no doubt Wesley's evangelistic concerns were specifically directed toward the poor. Yet, it would have been unthinkable for Wesley to have preached the good news of the gospel without also attending to the basic physical needs of his listeners. Even more than that, Wesley believed not only was the good Methodist's service to the poor necessary, life with the poor was absolutely required for the genuine Christian disciple.

According to Theodore Jennings, "Wesley could no more imagine a week without visiting the hovels of the poor than he could a week without participation in the Eucharist" (Theodore Jennings Jr., "Wesley and the Poor: an Agenda for Wesleyans," in *The Portion of the Poor: Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition*, p 21). His commitment was relentless. Wesley could say: "The honourable, the great, we are thoroughly willing to leave you. Only let us alone with the poor, the vulgar, the base, the outcasts of men" ("A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," *Works*, Jackson, 8:239).

Methodists gave to the poor, lived with the poor, and preferenced the poor; a matter of principal for Wesley, biblically based and theologically sound, but it was driven by contact with real persons whom Wesley called his people to love in the name of Christ. The Church of the Nazarene was founded with a similar driving agenda. It is only with deliberate thought and action that we will remain faithful to our roots.

## WESLEY ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

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### NOTES

Wesley was interested not only in feeding, clothing, and caring for the poor but also in rectifying and reforming the social structures that kept them poor. It was, and is, not good enough to call such oppressive structures an unfortunate result of the evil in the world that came as a result of the Fall. Acting, specific intentional acting, for what has come to be known as social justice must be at the heart of Wesleyan theology.

In the 1980s, one hundred million children died of poverty—as a point of reference, twelve million people died in the Nazi holocaust. A holocaust of neglect plagues this world. National, political, institutional structures contribute to this horrific reality. It is the Christians' responsibility not only to work to alleviate the symptoms of suffering but also to alleviate the reasons for the suffering. This applies personally, locally, and globally.



## WESLEY AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY



### NOTES

Since the 1960s, various theologies have arisen that have now come to be known as liberation theologies. They are characterized by the doing of theology from a particular context, a context from within a marginalized group. Although some of these have developed into complex theological reflection, for each, the practical known as praxis (liberation of the oppressed) remains the ultimate goal.

Examples are:

- Black Theology
- Feminist Theology
- South American Liberation Theology—known as S.A.L.T.
- Asian Theology
- Latino Theology

Scholars have made connections between the culture of these movements and the culture of John Wesley's optimism regarding social transformation. Wesley advocated for black slaves in England and America; he is recognized as a rather progressive feminist in light of his views on men and women's spiritual and ecclesiastical equality, and his sanction of women's right to preach.

As has been stated, he sided with the oppressed, the poor, and the outcast of society. There is definitely a theme of liberation in Wesley's individual and social vision. Flowing out of his optimism about true liberation from the power of sin in this life, he envisioned social liberation for certain classes and marginalized groups, and he demanded his Methodist people work for such human freedoms. Yet, unfortunately, popular evangelical Christianity today is sometimes known more for its individualism, its escapist mentality, its separatist tendencies, and even its hate for the other. Wesleyan theology offers a different paradigm. The Church of the Nazarene, as an evangelical but not fundamentalist church, has opportunity to make a difference in the world's perception of Christianity. Holiness and perfect love, as taught and lived by John Wesley and his followers was not only our past but is also our future, if we let it guide us not just as our distinctive but as our directive.

 **NOTES**

In conclusion, a quote from Wesleyan theologian Theodore Runyon:

“Some theologians have found a peculiar affinity between Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification and movements for social change. When on the individual level Christian perfection becomes the goal, fundamental hope is aroused that the future can surpass the present. And a corresponding holy dissatisfaction is aroused with regard to any present state of affairs—a dissatisfaction that supplies the critical edge necessary to keep the process of individual transformation moving. Moreover, this holy dissatisfaction is readily transferable from the realm of the individual to that of society, where it provides a persistent motivation for reform in the light of ‘a more perfect way’ that goes beyond any status quo” (The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today, Theodore Runyon, p. 168).

## APPLICATION

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**NOTES**

1. Write a reflection paper and relate how Wesley's practice of acts of mercy corresponds with contemporary opportunities for compassionate ministry.
2. Write a reflection paper on how Wesleyanism for social justice compares to your own beliefs about social justice.
3. Write a reflection paper on how the Wesleyan theology of liberation affects your local congregation.
4. List some of the particular functions of your church that address the needs of the world—what might be called the external functions of the Church.

## EXAM



### NOTES

1. Wesley would fly away from the prosperous in order to minister to the poor.  
A. True  
B. False
2. Wesleyan theology is intensely optimistic not only about individual transformation but also social transformation; about the difference perfect love can make, not only in the individual's life and in the Church but also in the world.  
A. True  
B. False
3. Wesley believed there was no holiness but social holiness.  
A. True  
B. False
4. Wesley saw the necessity of preaching "salvation" and its assurance.  
A. True  
B. False
5. According to Wesley, "It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance."  
A. True  
B. False
6. Evangelism, for Wesley, must lead to placing a new believer into a method of spiritual formation if its results are to be lasting.  
A. True  
B. False
7. Wesley's evangelistic concerns were specifically directed toward the rich.  
A. True  
B. False
8. Wesley believed that not only was the good Methodist's service to the poor necessary, life with the poor was absolutely required for the genuine Christian disciple.  
A. True  
B. False

**NOTES**

9. Wesley was interested not only in feeding, clothing, and caring for the poor but also in rectifying and reforming the social structures that kept them poor.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
10. There is definitely a theme of liberation in Wesley's individual and social vision.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
11. The Church of the Nazarene, as an evangelical but not fundamentalist Church, has opportunity to make a difference in the world's perception of Christianity.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
12. Holiness and perfect love, as taught and lived by John Wesley and his followers, was not only our past but is also our future, if we let it guide us not just as our distinctive but as our directive.
  - A. True
  - B. False

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor:

1. Share your reflection paper and relate how you feel Wesley's practice of acts of mercy corresponds with contemporary opportunities for compassionate ministry.
2. Share your reflection paper on how Wesleyanism for social justice compares to your own beliefs about social justice.
3. Discuss your reflection paper on how you see the Wesleyan theology of liberation affects your local congregation.
4. Share your list of the particular functions of your church that address the needs of the world.