

## Wesley's Prescription for Making Disciples of Jesus Christ: Insights for the 21st Century Church

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This is the religion we long to see established in the world, a religion of love and joy and peace, having its seat in the heart, in the inmost soul, but ever showing itself by its fruits, continually springing forth, not only in all innocence... but likewise in every kind of beneficence, in spreading virtue and happiness all around it.<sup>1</sup>

When John Wesley articulated this as the driving vision of the emerging Methodist movement there was no indication that he considered it to be only a pious-unreachable-goal. Even in his later years, as he increasingly lamented how little this goal was being realized among his own people, let alone in the broader church and society, Wesley's optimism about the transforming potential of God's grace for our lives and our world remained clear. While this optimism carried over into nineteenth century Methodism, its strains were increasingly muted (often by being transmuted into simple affirmation of our inherent goodness) among large branches of Wesley's heirs as the century wore on. The global conflicts, developmental disappointments, and political intrigues of the twentieth century have since chipped away at all forms of optimism, leaving most of Wesley's current descendants so brazened that his vision strikes us as hopelessly idealistic.

Meanwhile, these same traumatic events have fueled a growing lament in the closing decades of the twentieth century about how poorly we are doing as public cultures in raising up citizens whose lives are characterized by innocence and beneficence. In North America at least, this lament has often been tied to advocacy of religious communities as among the few remaining promising agencies for forming persons with an enduring commitment to the good of our larger society.<sup>2</sup> But honesty has required North American Christians to admit that few of our churches are doing any better than culture at large in nurturing an enduring character of innocence and beneficence in our members.<sup>3</sup> If ever there was a time for Methodists to reclaim Wesley's vision of the goal of our existence and ministry, for the good of the world, it is now!

There are several signs that Wesley's spiritual descendants around the world are recognizing both this need and this opportunity. One concrete expression of this recognition in United Methodism was the addition to the *Book of Discipline* in 1996 of the statement: "The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Local churches provide the most significant arena through which

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<sup>1</sup> *Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, §4, Works 11:46. 1

<sup>2</sup> See, among others, Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper, 1985); Reginald W. Bibby, *Mosaic Madness: The Poverty and Potential of Life in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1990); Robert Bellah, et al., *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); and Don E. Eberly, *The Content of America's Character: Recovering Civic Virtue* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> On mainline churches see Steve Tipton's chapter (focused on United Methodism), "The Public Church," in Bellah, et al., *Good Society*, 179-219; and Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods. The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 1987). For similar evaluation of evangelical churches see Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

disciple-making occurs.<sup>4</sup> The significance of this addition is best understood in historical context. Wesley had defined the mission of early Methodism as "not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, *particularly the Church*; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land."<sup>5</sup> This definition reflects the para-church nature of early Methodism. The movement was not concerned primarily with bringing outsiders into the church but with encouraging and aiding nominal church members to take more seriously their Christian identity and formation. By contrast, when American Methodists organized The Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784 they declared that "God's purpose in raising up the preachers called Methodists in America was to reform the continent, and to spread holiness across the land."<sup>6</sup> While there are echoes of the earlier statement here, note that the goal reforming the church has been dropped. At a structural level this reflects the simple fact that the American preachers were no longer a marginal subculture seeking to influence establishment Anglicanism, they were now themselves the church. But it also opens the possibility for "spreading holiness" to be equated largely with gathering folk into the church, downplaying the role of continuing transformation of those in the church. This possibility too often became the sad reality, significantly weakening the transforming influence of Methodist congregations on their surrounding North American culture.<sup>7</sup>

This outcome is what United Methodists are seeking to reverse in defining their mission as "making disciples of Jesus Christ" and emphasizing the role of local congregations in this process. In no way are we setting aside the historic Methodist commitment to reform and spread holiness in our various public settings. Rather, we are reclaiming Wesley's commitment to the intentional formation of real Christian character in our members, in part because of a deeper appreciation of how this formation undergirds truly faithful and enduring participation in ministry to our troubled and needy world.

Obviously, the simple act affirming that the church's prime mission is making disciples of Jesus Christ will not deliver such desirable results. These will come only as local congregations actually embody this mission with increasing effectiveness. The strength of the connectional structure of Methodism is that these congregations are neither left solely to the happenstance of their local situation nor expected to minister solely out of their own resources. That is why we must be asking at every level of the denomination what can be done to encourage and enable local United Methodist congregations to embody more effectively their mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. And these decisions need to be guided by some wisdom about what contributes most significantly to making disciples. While helpful insights can be gleaned from every instance where Christian communities have been reasonably effective in nurturing their members in Christ-likeness, it is appropriate for contemporary Methodists to begin by recalling the advice of John Wesley on the topic—advice that has been broadly forgotten.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (2000), ¶120.

<sup>5</sup> "Large Minutes," Q.3, *Works* (Jackson) 8:299. Emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> See p. 4 of the reprint of the Minutes of the organizing conference in *Methodist Disciplines, 1785-1789* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Randy L. Maddox, "Social Grace: The Eclipse of the Church as a Means of Grace in American Methodism," in *Methodism in its Cultural Milieu*, edited by Tim Macquiban (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1994), 131-60.

## I. Wesley's Conception of the Task of Making Disciples of Jesus Christ

Interestingly, the best place to start in our dialogue with Wesley about effectiveness in making disciples of Jesus Christ is to probe why he apparently never used the phrase "making disciples," and his use of the term "disciple" itself to refer to Christians was largely confined to allusions to biblical texts containing the term. Rather than taking this precedent as an argument against the current United Methodist statement on the mission of the church, we need to consider how it reflects Wesley's convictions about the mission of early Methodism in the Anglican church, and suggest the implication of these convictions for Methodist churches today.

While Wesley recognized that "disciple" was a common biblical and traditional name of followers of Christ, he would also have been aware of connotations of the term common in his day. His apparent reticence in using the term likely reflects his desire to avoid-perhaps even to challenge-the ascription of these connotations to either Methodism or the Christian life.

For example, the word "disciple" is sometimes used pejoratively to designate persons who accept without question the teachings of some human leader. Wesley illustrates this usage when he described the claims of a book as so manifestly false that "none but a disciple of Voltaire could swallow them."<sup>8</sup> At the same time Wesley was aware of the charge that Methodism was a partisan movement within Anglicanism which demanded total agreement with his distinctive theological claims. His sermons "A Caution Against Bigotry" and "Catholic Spirit" were essentially rebuttals of the suggestion that he expected Methodists to be his "disciples" in this sense. The fact that his only exhortations to his people to be "disciples" are in biblical allusions which stress that Christ is our model and norm reflects the same sensitivity. It is in keeping with this precedent that United Methodists have articulated their defining mission simply as "making disciples of Jesus Christ." Promoting distinctive Methodist teachings and practices is of value only to the degree that these serve our defining mission.

There is a second connotation of "disciple" with which Wesley would also have been uncomfortable. One of the most common synonyms suggested for this term in dictionaries is "adherent." On these terms, "making disciples of Jesus Christ" could be taken to involve simply gaining adherents to a Christian community. While Wesley valued participation in a Christian community, he also recognized that true discipleship involved much more than *mere* adherence. Indeed, as we noted above, the very focus of the mission of early Methodism was on encouraging and aiding those who were merely nominal Christians to become *real* Christians-that is, to be transformed into persons who truly love God and neighbor. Wesley would surely expect his heirs to share this stronger sense of what it means to be (and make) a disciple of Jesus Christ.

There is one further connotation of "disciple" which may help to account for Wesley's reticence in using this term. Another typical dictionary synonym for the term is "pupil." The close connection between this synonym and the pupa stage of butterflies highlights the possible suggestion that disciples are persons in an early transitional stage, a stage that they soon leave behind. But if the mission of

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<sup>8</sup> *Journal* (27 April 1778), *Works* 23:82.

Methodism is to make *real* Christians, then one thing that Wesley became profoundly convinced of was that this involves more than just an initial spiritual transition. His recognition of the role of "being born of God" in becoming a real Christian was solidly established in the events surrounding Aldersgate. In the immediate afterglow of these events he assumed that everyone born of God was immediately transformed into the full moral character of Christ. It did not take long for this "great expectation" to be called into question, and Wesley began stressing as much the further transformation expected of real Christians as he did the crucial transformation that comes in our initial spiritual birth.<sup>9</sup> His mature conviction is captured well in his pastoral response to a young correspondent:

You are yourself a living witness of this religion. But it is only in a low degree. I grant you are only just beginning to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is an unspeakable blessing, that he shows you this, in so clear and strong a light. ... Go straight forward, and you shall be all a Christian!<sup>10</sup>

Note in this response that the experience of the new birth is just the beginning of "making" a disciple of Jesus Christ, this task is not complete until they are fully transformed into Christ's likeness. Given Wesley's dynamic sense of Christian Perfection, where there always remains room for further growth, this is ultimately a life-long process. It is hard to imagine a more admirable-or challenging-conception of the task of making disciples of Jesus Christ. If this is the mission of the church, what advice might Wesley have on how to pursue it effectively?

## **II. Wesley's Wisdom about Effectiveness in Making Disciples of Jesus Christ**

The most focused presentation of Wesley's mature convictions about effective pursuit of the church's mission is a sermon written late in his life that was titled "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity."<sup>11</sup> This sermon opens with Wesley's assertion that the reason Christian communities around the globe had done so little good in the world was that they were producing so few real Christians. He then identified three factors of typical church life that together account for this lamentable state: first, in too few churches did members attain any adequate understanding of Christian doctrine; second, many of those churches which provided members with doctrinal instruction lacked corresponding provision of appropriate Christian discipline; and third, of churches which provided both doctrine and discipline, there remained in most a broad absence of the specific Christian practice of self-denial.

Most observers of church life would likely agree that Wesley's description of his time remains broadly applicable today. What might be less clear is the actual point and perceptiveness of Wesley's diagnosis of this situation, or of his corresponding prescription for effectiveness in raising up disciples of Jesus Christ. What makes doctrine so significant? What does Wesley mean by discipline? And why

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<sup>9</sup> See the fine discussion of these transitions in Richard Heitzenrater, "Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity," in *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 106-49

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Philothea Briggs (3 December 1772), *Letters* (Telford) 5:348-9

<sup>11</sup> Sermon 122, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," *Works* 4:86-96.

did he specifically highlight self-denial? Probing these questions may prove instructive for any consideration of how to encourage and support churches in the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ today.

### ***A. The Vital Role of Doctrine in Christian Life***

The first question we must ponder is why Wesley identified instruction in doctrine as foundational to the formation of real Christian life/character. To understand his conviction of this importance we need first to set aside the common equation of "doctrine" with highly theoretical formulations of obscure and debatable points in theology—such as whether Christ's presence in the Eucharist requires the transubstantiation of the elements. For Wesley such debatable formulations were "opinions" rather than doctrine.<sup>12</sup> His classic sermon "Catholic Spirit" vigorously rejected requiring agreement on theological opinions as a condition of Christian fellowship; as such, he surely did not consider instruction in "opinions" as essential to Christian formation. But Wesley went on to insist in this sermon that those with a truly catholic spirit will be "fixed as the sun" in their judgment concerning the "main branches of Christian doctrine."<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere he makes clear that even in these main branches the vital issue is embracing the central conviction of the doctrine, not developing expertise in philosophical explication of the doctrine.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Wesley's emphasis on doctrine related to its role of providing the *central convictions* that ought to guide believers' lives in the world.

Through his Anglican tradition Wesley imbibed from the early church an understanding of theology as fundamentally a practical discipline.<sup>15</sup> This understanding recognizes that we humans are "meaning-seeking creatures." We are not content for life merely to happen, we struggle to make sense of why it happens; and we do not typically act out of mere impulse, our choices about how to act are guided by our deepest convictions about the ultimate nature and purposes of life. The pattern of these orienting convictions is our functional "worldview," whether we can articulate it philosophically or not. This means that the primal dimension or embodiment of Christian "theology" is as the worldview that orients believers' lives in the world. As Paul put it, Christians perceive things rightly and act appropriately only when they have the "mind of Christ" (Phil. 2). That this involves holistic dispositions, not merely intellectual convictions, is evident from Paul's parallel emphasis on Christians nurturing the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5). The mind of Christ fosters, and is reciprocally strengthened by, loving service of others.

Paul's passionate appeal for Christians to emulate the "mind of Christ" reflects the reality that this orienting worldview is not unilaterally infused by God at one's conversion. Neither does it emerge effortlessly over time, or manifest itself spontaneously whenever it is needed. It must be cultivated, as

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<sup>12</sup> For more on this, see Randy L. Maddox, "Opinion, Religion, and 'Catholic Spirit': John Wesley on Theological Integrity," *Asbury Theological Journal* 47.1 (1992): 63-87.

<sup>13</sup> Sermon 39, "Catholic Spirit," §III.1, *Works* 2:93.

<sup>14</sup> Compare Sermon 55, "On the Trinity," §3 (*Works* 2:376-7) with §17 (2:384).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Randy L. Maddox, "Formation and Reflection: The Dynamics of Theology in Christian Life," *Quarterly Review* (Spring 2001).

part of the intentional process of growing in Christ-likeness. This need defines the pastoral<sup>16</sup> dimension of theology as a practical discipline—the task of forming/reforming a Christian worldview in believers. Since the worldview in question is holistic, this task has proven to involve a variety of activities aimed at invoking and shaping beliefs, affections, and character dispositions. The case of the early church is particularly revealing in this regard. Their theological energies were necessarily dominated by the task of forming a Christian worldview in new believers, and they pursued this task with a clear sense that the cultures within which they lived were bent on instilling quite different worldviews. In this context they prized most highly as "theologians" those who crafted such practical-theological materials as hymns, liturgies, catechetical orations, and spiritual discipline manuals. These materials established the rhythms and provided the repeated narrative and themes that served to instill Christ-likeness deeply in believers' hearts and minds.

It was in keeping with this early church precedent that Wesley understood himself as being a theologian.<sup>17</sup> His extensive literary efforts were focused on providing his Methodist people with the same types of practical-theological materials. Recognizing the role of basic "life- narratives" in forming and expressing one's worldview, he particularly exhorted his Methodists to live in the story of Christ, and the stories of exemplary Christians, so that their orienting narrative might be reshaped in keeping with the pattern of Christ. And acknowledging the formative impact of those favorite songs that embed themselves in our memories and being, he carefully edited a series of hymnbooks as guides for sustaining and shaping his Methodist people.

The pastoral wisdom of Wesley shines through in his appreciation for how the interconnecting "grammar" of the main branches of Christian doctrine serves to maintain balance in the Christian worldview. A good example is his emphasis on the importance of forming our Christian lives in keeping with the balance of the *whole* Christ-or "Christ in all his offices."<sup>18</sup> If we understand Christian life only in terms of Christ as prophet we are likely to reduce Christianity to legalism, and either despair at our failures or consume one another with judgmentalism. If we conceive Christian life only in terms of Christ as priest we will tend to reduce Christianity to an antinomian offer of forgiveness without any expectation (or promise!) of change. And if we focus only on Christ as King we could get caught up in a false perfectionism that fails to recognize the continuing role of confession and growth in the Christian life. As formative influences against such distortions John Wesley encouraged his American descendants to retain the rhythms of the church year, and Charles Wesley authored collections of hymns for each season of Christ's life.

In his diagnosis of the inefficacy of Christianity in his day Wesley touched on this need for balance, but emphasizes in addition the importance of properly understanding the basic Christian

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<sup>16</sup> I am using this term to describe the nature of the task, not to delimit who might engage in it. The tendency to restrict such formative work to clergy is regrettable and unjustified.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley – Practical Theologian," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23 (1988): 122-47.

<sup>18</sup> Note Wesley's insistence that his preachers "preach Christ in all his offices," in "Minutes" (9 August 1745), Q. 15, *John Wesley*, 150. This dynamic is discussed in Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 109-14. His concern about the balance of the Trinity is discussed on pp. 139-40.

convictions about our human condition and God's gracious provisions for our need.<sup>19</sup> Here we see Wesley engaging the *normative* dimension of theology as a practical discipline. His pastoral work had convinced him that a major reason why churches were producing so few real Christians was the prevalence of an inadequate understanding of the "salvation" Christianity offered. If this salvation is restricted simply to the forgiveness of sins, then the operating assumption becomes that "Christians are not better, just forgiven." On these terms, "making disciples" becomes little more than simply encouraging unbelievers to exercise justifying faith. There is no necessary emphasis on the role of subsequent transformation of the believer's moral character, indeed such emphasis may be actively disdained.

Nothing was more central to Wesley's life-long ministry that challenging this anemic conception of Christian salvation. He recognized that two biblical themes concerning salvation have had some tendency in Christian tradition to be played off against one another. One of these themes is epitomized by Romans 1-3, where our most basic human problem is the guilt by which we "fall short of the glory of God" and the crucial aspect of salvation is God's unmerited gift of justification. The other theme can be represented by Romans 7-8, where the deepest impact of sin is our spiritual debilitation ("What I want to do, I cannot!") and the key gracious gift of God is the empowering and healing presence of the Spirit. Wesley consistently and perceptively wove these two themes together in his doctrinal instruction on the nature of sin, grace, and salvation. The following quotes are representative:

*Two-fold Nature of Sin: Guilt and Disease.*

[Our sins], considered in regard to ourselves, are chains of iron and fetters of brass. They are wounds wherewith the world, the flesh, and the devil, have gashed and mangled us allover. They are diseases that drink up our blood and spirits, that bring us down to the chambers of the grave. But considered ... with regard to God, they are debts, immense and numberless.<sup>20</sup>

*Two-fold Nature of Grace: Mercy and Power*

By 'the grace of God' is sometimes to be understood that free love, that unmerited mercy, by which I, a sinner, through the merits of Christ am now reconciled to God. But in this place it rather means that power of God the Holy Ghost which 'worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.' As soon as ever the grace of God (in the former sense, his pardoning love) is manifested in our soul, the grace of God (in the latter sense, the power of his Spirit) takes place therein. And now we can perform through God, what to [ourselves] was impossible ... a renewal of soul after His likeness.<sup>21</sup>

*Two-fold Nature of Salvation: Pardon and Healing*

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<sup>19</sup> CF. Sermon 122, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," §6, *Works* 4:89.

<sup>20</sup> Sermon 26, "Sermon on the Mount IV," §III.13, *Works* 1:586.

<sup>21</sup> Sermon 12, "The Witness of Our Spirit," §§15-16, *Works* 1:309-10.

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. This implies all holy and heavenly tempers, and by consequence all holiness of conversation.<sup>22</sup>

The general point of these quotes should be clear, except perhaps for the last line quoted. It is a puzzling line in part because modern readers think of "tempers" almost exclusively in terms of emotional outbursts. Wesley is using the term here in a much broader sense common in the eighteenth century, where "temper" referred to an enduring character disposition (toward virtue or vice).<sup>23</sup> The remnant of this earlier meaning comes through when we speak today of tempered metal, which has been strengthened and given a characteristic shape. The line is also puzzling if we do not know that in the eighteenth century the word "conversation" referred to all one's outward actions, not just one's verbal discourse. Wesley is assuming here that our actions normally flow from our characteristic inclinations or dispositions.<sup>24</sup> Thus, if present salvation is ultimately expressed in holy living, it is grounded in the transformation of our distorted unholy tempers into holy tempers. Recalling the earlier discussion, we will live truly Christian lives in the world to the degree that we have taken on the "mind of Christ" and the "fruit of the Spirit."

Thus, the first advice that we might take from Wesley is that a congregation whose leaders take seriously the task of cultivating in its members a biblically grounded and theologically balanced sense of what it means to be a "Christian" will be more effective in making *real* disciples-believers who are committed to becoming different, not just being forgiven!

### ***B. The Two-fold Contribution of Regular Participation in the "Means of Grace"***

But how do we become different? Wesley would be the first to insist that careful doctrinal formation alone cannot effect this change! Transformation into Christ's likeness is made possible only by God's empowering and renewing grace at work in our lives. That is why Wesley moves from emphasis on doctrine in his diagnostic sermon to insist that development of real Christians also requires discipline.<sup>25</sup> The type of discipline Wesley had in mind is clear; he gave it official form as the three "General Rules" of his movement. All those who desire to seek "salvation" in its full biblical sense are exhorted to 1) do no harm, 2) do as much good as they can for others, and 3) regularly participate in "all the ordinances of God."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *A Farther Appeal to Mean of Reason and Religion, Pt. I*, §3, *Works* 11:106.

<sup>23</sup> See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 69-70; and Kenneth J. Collins, "John Wesley's Topography of the Heart Dispositions, Tempers and Affections," *Methodist History* 36 (1998): 162-75.

<sup>24</sup> Note the more extended summary in *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Baily of Cork*, §III.1, *Works* 9:309: "From the true love of God and [other humans] directly flows every Christian grace, every holy and happy temper. And from these springs uniform holiness of conversation."

<sup>25</sup> Sermon 122, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," §7, *Works* 4:90.

<sup>26</sup> See *Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies*, *Works* 9:69-73.



The third exhortation reflects Wesley's deep conviction that regular participation in the means of grace is essential for making disciples of Jesus Christ. He repeatedly denounced the folly of those who desire "the end without the means"-that is, who expect growth in faith and holiness without regular participation in the means through which God has chosen to convey grace.<sup>27</sup> One of his common ways to begin explaining this connection, including in the sermon we have been exploring, was to quote a proverb from the early church: "The soul and the body make a [human]; the Spirit and discipline make a Christian."<sup>28</sup> This proverb points toward the dual benefit that Wesley believed we derive from regular participation in the means of grace.

### 1. *Responsive Nature of Christian Life: The **Spirit** and Discipline make a Christian*

Wesley's early sermons were primarily reminders of the duty to live like Christ. In these sermons he reflects the model of spirituality he learned at his mother's knee and that was most broadly represented in Anglicanism of his youth.<sup>29</sup> This model identified the greatest obstacle to holy living as the passionate dimension of human life-i.e., those emotional reactions, instincts, and the like that are not a product of our rational initiative or under fully conscious control. The normative corollary was that proper choice and action are possible only as we subject this distracting passionate dimension of life to rational control. This is admittedly not an easy task, but it was assumed that through exhortation and regular practice-empowered by grace-we could habituate an increased aptitude for maintaining righteousness

As he sought to live out this inherited model of Christian spirituality Wesley became increasingly convinced of its inadequacy. He learned by hard experience that rational persuasion of "the beauty and advantage of virtue and the deformity and ill effect of vice alone cannot resist, much less overcome and heal, one irregular appetite or passion."<sup>30</sup> As a result his consuming question became not "What would God have me do?" but "How can I do what I know God would have me do?" In particular, "How can I truly love God and others?" In the events leading up to Aldersgate Wesley was repeatedly reminded of the biblical theme that God's gracious acceptance precedes and provides the possibility of holiness on our part. When he experienced a deep assurance of God's pardoning love at Aldersgate he found "heavenly, healing light" breaking in upon his soul that freed/enabled him to love God and

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<sup>27</sup> For a few of the best known examples, see Letter to Count Zinzendorf and the Church at Herrnhut (5-8 August 1740), *Works* 26:27; Sermon 16, "The Means of Grace," *Works* 1:378-07; Letter to William Law (6 January 1756), *Letters* (Telford) 3:366; and *Cautions and Directions Given to the Greatest Professors in the Methodist Societies* (1762), §II, *John Wesley*, 300.

<sup>28</sup> Sermon 122, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," §7, *Works* 4:90. For some other instances, see *Journal* (17 August 1750), *Works* 20:357; Sermon 113, "The Late Work of God in North America," §I.7, *Works* 3:598; and Letter to Adam Clarke (3 January 1787), *Letters* (Telford) 7:362.

<sup>29</sup> For more exposition of this model (illustrated from his mother's teachings) and of Wesley's eventual alternative to it, see Randy L. Maddox, "A Change of Affections: The Development, Dynamics and Dethronement of John Wesley's 'Heart Religion'," in *Heart Religion in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*, edited by Richard Steele (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Sermon 62, "The End of Christ's Coming," §§1-3, *Works* 2:472-3. Similar in Sermon 70, "Case of Reason Impartially Considered," §II.8-9, *Works* 2:598.

neighbor as he had so unsuccessfully longed to do.<sup>31</sup> This experience of having "the love of God shed abroad in one's heart" soon became central to his mature model of Christian life.

Wesley's articulation of this mature model was aided by his embrace of the empiricist swing in eighteenth-century British philosophy. For empiricism truth is experienced receptively by the human intellect, rather than preexistent within it or imposed by reason upon our experience. In terms of the dynamics of human willing this philosophical conviction led to the parallel insistence that humans are *moved* to action only as we are experientially *affected*. To use an example, they held that rational persuasion of the rightness of loving others is not sufficient of itself to actually move us to do so; we are ultimately inclined and enabled to love others only as we experience being loved ourselves. Wesley's crucial application of this truth became his insistence that it is only in response to our *experience* of God's gracious love for us, shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that our love for God and others can be awakened and grow.<sup>32</sup>

In this insistence Wesley was giving the abstract affirmation that grace is prevenient to holy living concrete embodiment as a model of the Christian life. Grace is identified not as some extrinsic "gift" but as the very Presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The human will is seen not as a reservoir of inherent volitional power but as a capacity to be affected and to "reflect" what we experience. Thereby the freedom to live Christlike lives is grounded not in our own capacities but in God's empowering encounter. Yet our integrity or accountability is preserved because, while we do not have the capacity to self-generate love, we do have the capacity (what Wesley called "liberty") to stifle responsive loving.

The foundational assumption of Wesley's revised model of Christian life, then, was that this life is *responsive* in nature—not only at its beginning, but all along the journey. He felt so strongly about this that in one of his most extended descriptions of the dynamics of the Christian life he apparently coined the word "re-act" to make his point:

[T]he life of God in the soul of a believer...immediately and necessarily implies the continual inspiration of God's Holy Spirit: God's breathing into the soul, and the soul's breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, the re-action of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart [But] God does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul re-acts upon God. ... He first loves us, and manifests himself unto us ... He will not continue to breathe into our soul unless our soul breathes toward him again; unless our love, and prayer, and thanksgiving return to him.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Sermon 9, "Spirit of Bondage and Adoption," §III.1-3, *Works* 1:260-1; and Sermon 77, "Spiritual Worship," §II.5, *Works* 3:96.7.

<sup>32</sup> This point permeates Wesley's post-Aldersgate works. For a few examples, see *Character of a Methodist*, §13, *Works* 9:39; *An Earnest Appeal to Mean of Reason and Religion*, §61, *Works* 11:70; *A Farther Appeal to Mean of Reason and Religion*, Pt. I §I.3, *Works* 11:106; Sermon 10, "The Witness of the Spirit I," §I.8, *Works* 1:274; and Sermon 120, "The Unity of the Diving Being," §17 *Works* 4:67.

<sup>33</sup> Sermon 19, "The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God," §III.2-3, *Works* 1:442. This sermon is cited as a pioneer use of "react" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 1989) 13:256.

A second advice that Wesley would offer us, then, is that a congregation whose leaders encourage regularly experiencing this enlivening presence of the Spirit will be more effective in raising up vital disciples of Christ-believers who "reflect" God's love in their engagement with the world.

## 2. *Formative Nature of Christian Life: The Spirit and **Discipline** make a Christian*

To be sure, this reflection is not inevitable. Note in the passage just quoted how directly Wesley moves from the affirmation that grace is responsive to the insistence that it is also responsible—if we do not re-act, God will cease to act. This integral connection was crucial to Wesley's mature model of Christian life, and he defended it vigorously against the tendency of some of his evangelical colleagues to cast divine grace and human responsibility in a polar relationship. This tendency led them to worry that any emphasis on the human role in salvation discounted our dependence upon grace. At its extreme, this worry had significant impact on expectations about spiritual transformation. For a few, even desiring transformation betrayed a lack of gratitude for God's unmerited forgiveness. Others acknowledged that transformation is promised in Scripture, but assume that it is unilaterally (and likely instantaneously) performed by God. Anything not directly changed by God was judged as not meant to be changed in this life.

The majority of the Christian tradition has rejected this strong polar casting of divine grace and human responsibility, seeing it as untrue to Scripture and Christian experience. As Wesley reminded his followers, even Saint Augustine (a primal source of the Western Christian tendency to polarization) insisted that "The God who made us without ourselves will not save us without ourselves."<sup>34</sup> Eastern Christian theologians, who lay particular stress on the healing dimension of salvation, have underlined this *co-operant* nature of grace even more clearly. After all, what physician (including the Divine Physician) would be affronted by patients faithfully participating in prescribed therapy? Quite the contrary, on this model the most logical expectation is that our full spiritual transformation would be an extended process that included a vital role for therapeutic practices in which we must faithfully engage.

Consistent with his emphasis on the healing dimension of salvation, Wesley also insisted on the co-operant nature of God's gracious work in our lives. His sermon "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," based on Philippians 2:12-13, seeks to allay Western fears about this conception of grace. He repeatedly underlines the primacy of God's gracious initiative in the whole process of salvation: It is only because God is *already* at work in us, empowering and inclining us, that we *can* work out our salvation. But Wesley then rejects any suggestion that our working is an inevitable result of God's grace: If we do not responsively put God's gracious empowerment to work, God will cease to work.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Sermon 63, "The General Spread of the Gospel," §12, *Works* 2:490; and Sermon 85, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," §III.7, *Works* 3:208-9.

<sup>35</sup> Sermon 85, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," *Works* 3:199-209.

The ultimate reason for this is that, for Wesley, God is more fundamentally like a loving parent than like a sovereign monarch-God will not finally force our obedience.<sup>36</sup>

This reference to obedience provides a good occasion to probe further what Wesley meant by the "discipline" he identified as crucial to forming real Christians. In our present setting the word discipline is most typically assumed to refer to the *punishment* one receives for lapses in obedience. On this understanding Wesley would appear to be recommending that the church be quick to punish every occasion of failure to act in a Christlike manner! But consider what happens if we invoke a different use of , 'discipline,' a use common today mainly in the realms of athletics and music. On this use a discipline is a *practice* that one engages in regularly in order to develop the capacity or "freedom" for desired behaviors to flow forth naturally. Here the issue is not immediate reward and punishment but long-term impact. Failure to practice means increased difficulty (and less reliability) in attaining one's desired goal. This sounds more like what Wesley had in mind when he argued that without "a thorough experience and practice" of the tenets of loving God, loving our neighbor as ourselves, and the like, all efforts toward a Christian life will be "utterly vain and ineffectual."<sup>37</sup>

As this suggests, Wesley had more in mind than individual acts of obedience when he encouraged his followers to co-operate with God's grace. He was particularly concerned that they engage *informative practices* that would contribute to their present salvation-that is, to attaining the holy tempers that provide greater "freedom" for holy actions. Here we need to underline one aspect of Wesley's mature insights into the dynamics of human willing. While he insisted that our affections are responsive, he did not consider them to be simply transitory. On the contrary, repeated engagement naturally focuses and strengthens them into enduring dispositions toward similar response in the future (i.e., into either holy or unholy tempers). Accordingly, Wesley made clear to his followers that God does not typically infuse holy tempers like love, patience, and meekness instantaneously; regenerating grace awakens in believers only their "seeds."<sup>38</sup> For these seeds to strengthen and take shape they need continuing gracious energizing by God, but they also need to be exercised and improved by regular engagement in the practices that God has designed to allow us to "manifest all holy and heavenly tempers, even the same 'mind that was in Christ Jesus."<sup>39</sup>

Thus, a third suggestion that Wesley would offer his current heirs is that a congregation which has been led to appreciate the progressive "freeing" impact of formative disciplines will be more likely to witness disciples attaining significant maturity of Christlikeness in its midst.

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> *A Farther Appeal to Mean of Reason and Religion, Part I*, §III.7, *Works* 11:128-9.

<sup>38</sup> See *Minutes* (2 August 1745), Q. 1, *John Wesley*, 152. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 178-9 discusses two passages where Wesley argues that holy tempers can be implanted in a fully mature state.

### 3. Wesley's Balanced Means of Grace: The Spirit *and* Discipline make a Christian

As a practical theologian, Wesley was not content with merely exhorting his people to appreciate the empowering experience of the Spirit and the freeing effect of formative disciplines. He recognized the importance of providing concrete opportunities to experience the Spirit and to engage in formative practices, and that the selection and design of these opportunities was the most crucial pastoral issue he faced.

The impact of Wesley's mature convictions about Christian life at this practical-theological level is clear. His earliest writings, operating out of his inherited "habituated rational control" model, give particular emphasis to scripture reading, sermons, and prayer (all of which address us intellectually) as the means to insure Christian living. By contrast, lists of recommended means of grace after Aldersgate are both more extensive and more diverse-including items ranging from such universal Christian practices as fasting, prayer, eucharist, and devotional readings to more distinctively Methodist practices like class meetings, love feasts, and special rules of holy living.<sup>40</sup> As Henry Knight has argued, the balance of items on these later lists reflects Wesley's bi-focal concern that his people not only experience the empowering presence of God but are also formed in the character of God.<sup>41</sup> Put in terms of the early church quotation we have been following, the mature pattern of the means of grace that Wesley recommended to his people was crafted to provide them with both *Spirit* and *discipline*.

The degree of intentionality with which Wesley considered the effective balancing of the means of grace is particularly evident in his 1781 sermon "On Zeal."<sup>42</sup> While praising the broad eighteenth-century evangelical awakening for renewing religious zeal in Britain, this sermon highlights Wesley's perception that this zeal was not as beneficial as it ought to be because it was too often focused on peripheral matters, rather than on those most central to Christian life. In view of this situation, Wesley offered the following tightly-packed sketch of the relative value of the various aspects of Christian life:

In a Christian believer love sets upon the throne, namely love of God and [other humans], which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival. In a circle near the throne are all holy tempers: long-suffering, etc. In an exterior circle are all the works of mercy, whether to the souls or bodies of [others]. By these we exercise all holy tempers; by these we continually improve them, so that these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed works of piety: reading and hearing the word; public, family, private prayer; receiving the Lord's Supper; fasting and abstinence. Lastly, that his followers

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Sermon 1, "Salvation by Faith," §III.2, *Works* 1:125; and Sermon 92, "On Zeal," §II.5, *Works* 3:313.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., *Journal* (25 June 1740), *Works* 19:157; *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies*, §§4-6, *Works* 9:70-3; "Directions given to the Band Societies," §III, *Works* 9:79; *Minutes* (2 Aug. 1745), Q. 11, *John Wesley*, 153; Sermon 16, "The Means of Grace," §II.1, *Works* 1:381; *NT Notes*, Matt. 12:7, Acts 2:42, Eph. 6:18, "Large Minutes," Q. 48, *Works* (Jackson) 8:322-3; Sermon 85, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," §II.4, *Works* 3:205-6; and Sermon 98, "On Visiting the Sick," §1, *Works* 3:385.

<sup>41</sup> Henry Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 11, 35ff.

<sup>42</sup> Sermon 92, "On Zeal," *Works* 3:308-21.

may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one-the church.<sup>43</sup>

Wesley then proceeded to exhort his people to devote more zeal to faithful engagement in the various works of piety than to advocating for their particular branch of the church, relatively more zeal yet to works of mercy, even more zeal to the holy tempers, and their greatest zeal of all to love of God and neighbor.

While Wesley borrowed the initial notion of this comparative valuation of Christian life from James Garden, the details and emphases are clearly his own.<sup>44</sup> For example, while Garden stressed that our love for God was the center around which the rest of Christian life revolves, Wesley added his characteristic connection of the love of God with love of neighbor (and was surely as concerned about the love of God and neighbor that we *experience* as he was about the that which we *express*). Likewise, there is no mention in Garden of the interconnecting role of the holy tempers between the means of grace and our expression of love to God and neighbor. Most striking of all, there is no discussion of works of mercy in Garden!

Wesley's emphasis on the works of mercy in this passage deserves special attention. Note first his insistence that they are a *means of grace*. He recognized that they are more commonly viewed primarily as duties, which we undertake because it is what God commands or because it helps others. Without denying these dimensions, Wesley wants us to consider that we need to engage in works of mercy for our own sake as well. They are another of the life-giving practices that God has graciously designed to empower us and to help shape our holy tempers!<sup>45</sup>

Moving further, Wesley not only places works of mercy among the means of grace, he assigns them a more immediate relation to forming holy tempers than works of piety! To be sure, this relative assignment does not mean that Wesley would easily acquiesce to forced choices between engaging in works of mercy or in works of piety. He considered the empowering and formative impact of both to be essential to nurturing holiness of heart and life. However it appears that he believed works of mercy make a unique contribution to well-rounded Christian formation, and was particularly worried that his followers were neglecting its benefit.

At least part of this unique contribution is that certain key virtues constitutive of the holy life are best awakened and strengthened into enduring patterns by works of mercy. As Ted Jennings reminds us, Wesley repeatedly warned that hoarding one's resources in the face of the needy directly endangers such virtues as humility and patience, while fostering such vices as resentment and contempt.<sup>46</sup> These

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<sup>43</sup> Sermon 92, "On Zeal," §II.5, *Works* 3:313.

<sup>44</sup> Wesley first read Garden's *Discurs academicus de Theologia Comparativa* (London, 1699) in 1733 while a fellow at Lincoln College. In 1753 he included in his *Christian Library* (22:245-87) an abridgement of the English translation of this work: James Garden, *Comparative Theology; or the true and solid ground of pure and peaceable theology* (London, 1700).

<sup>45</sup> For a more extended discussion of this point, see Randy L. Maddox, "'Visit the Poor': Wesley, the Poor, and the Sanctification of Believers," in *The Wesleys and the Poor: The Legacy and Development of Methodist Attitudes toward Poverty*, edited by Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2002).

<sup>46</sup> Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 33-8.

warnings echo the insistence of recent work on character formation that there is no generic process for developing virtues.<sup>47</sup>

A particularly relevant example is compassion. The fact that we argue over whether compassion is more an emotion (something we "suffer") or more a disposition (an inherent controllable tendency) reflects an awareness that one is not likely to develop compassion without undergoing specific experiences. We must usually experience some type of hardship ourselves to be able to identify with the hardship of others. But we must also experience true suffering or neediness on the part of an other.<sup>48</sup> It is not enough, for example, to send in our money dutifully in response to reports of need. Authentic compassion can only take form through open encounter with those in need. This is why Wesley emphasized the importance of *visiting* the sick and needy even more than he did offering them financial aid. He recognized that failure to visit was a major cause of the lack of compassion that lay behind withholding aid.<sup>49</sup>

In this light, Wesley would surely counsel his contemporary descendants fourthly that a congregation whose leaders maintain and encourage participation in a well-rounded and balanced set of the means of grace—specifically including works of mercy—will be much more effective in producing disciples who emulate the compassion of Christ.

### ***C. The Pivotal Place of Self-Denial in Discipleship to Christ***

The glow of such high hopes provides an appropriate backdrop for returning to Wesley's diagnostic sermon, where it is clear that Wesley had learned by sad experience that the simple provision of a carefully balanced set of the means of grace did not insure the transformation of those in his societies. He charged that it was ultimately a lack of the specific practice of "self-denial" that hindered so many of his followers from becoming *fully* disciples of Christ.<sup>50</sup> This assessment raises the last of the major questions we need to probe: "Why did Wesley highlight self-denial as so crucial to the formation of Christian life?"

To appreciate the pivotal role that Wesley assigns to practices of self-denial we need once again to consider his insight into human willing. We noted earlier that Wesley came to evaluate the conception of the will as an inherent capacity to initiate action to be naive and misleading. His mature alternative equated the will with the "affections," or our human capacity to be affected and to respond in kind. The obvious worry to raise about this alternative is determinism (as found, for example, in fellow empiricist David Hume). Wesley's way of acknowledging the deep impact that life experiences, formative influences, and our surrounding environment have upon us, without rendering us totally determined by these, was to insist that along with our responsive affections (i.e., our will) God has

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<sup>47</sup> See in particular: Robert Kruschwitz & Robert Roberts, *The Virtues: Contemporary Essays on Moral Character* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1987); and G. Simon Harak, *Virtuous Passions: The Formation of Christian Character* (Mahwah, NY: Paulist, 1993).

<sup>48</sup> For a particularly insightful analysis of this dynamic (in a more specific context), see Richard B. Steele, "Unremitting Compassion: The Moral Psychology of Parenting Children with Genetic Disorders," *Theology Today* 57 (2000): 161-74.

<sup>49</sup> See esp. Sermon 98, "On Visiting the Sick," §I.3, *Works* 3:387.

graciously endowed humans with "liberty." That is, we have a modest but crucial capacity to inhibit specific responses of our will.

The inhibiting capacity of liberty is what renders humans morally and spiritually responsible for specific actions. It also makes us accountable for the dispositions or tempers that may significantly control our actions (both by facilitating acting in certain ways and by constraining alternative acts), since these tempers were formed by repeated instances of inhibiting or allowing specific responses. It is crucial to note in this regard a distinction Wesley is making between liberty and the "freedom" we need to live the Christian life. Liberty is simply our graciously gifted ability *not* to act on our impulses. As such, it provides at most *freedom from* the total determinism of unholy tempers; it has no inherent power to initiate alternative holy acts. The *freedom for* these alternative responses comes through our affections as we experience God's further gracious gift of loving encounter. And yet here again liberty has a role to play—we can inhibit our response to these gracious encounters and stifle their character transforming effect, or we can welcome them and allow them to form progressively the holy tempers that provide us with more consistent and enduring *freedom for* holy acts.

Wesley's conviction of the importance of self-denial relates to this crucial but limited role of liberty in relation to our dispositions. His sermon on "Self-Denial" stakes out perceptively our situation. When we begin to engage the spiritual life consciously we find that we are not starting on pristine terms. Rather, in our fallen state we find ourselves already prone to clannishness, greed, sloth, and other unholy tempers; and we recognize that these gain increasing ascendancy over us as we allow them to be expressed.<sup>51</sup> For Wesley, self-denial is basically exercising liberty to resist these unholy tempers. He is quite careful to make the point that neither "self-denial" nor the stronger language of "taking up the cross" should be taken to imply physical practices like tearing our flesh, wearing haircloth, or iron girdles, or anything else that would impair our bodily health. It is instead simply "to deny our own will where it does not fall in with the will of God."<sup>52</sup> It is resisting the expression of our unholy tempers, in order to prevent their further strengthening and—more importantly—to make room for reflecting instead the life transforming love of God and neighbor that we encounter in the various means of grace. Having defined self-denial, Wesley moves on in his sermon on this topic to stress how integral the exercise of self-denial is to effectual participation in the means of grace and their life-giving benefits. Those who will not resist at all their unholy tempers, in response to God's awakening overtures, reject the means of grace and squander their potential revitalizing power. Newborn Christians who do not continue to resist unholy tempers remaining in their lives often fade in their engagement of the means of grace, dramatically curtailing and some times abandoning their renewing affect. And the many Christians who resist only selective unholy tempers tend to engage the means of grace in a haphazard manner, preventing their full transformation into Christlikeness. A specific example Wesley highlights

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<sup>50</sup> See Sermon 121, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," §§13-14, *Works* 4:93-4.

<sup>51</sup> See Sermon 48, "Self-Denial," §§3-5 *Works* 2:243. Note: Wesley describes this situation with the common Augustinian language of the will being "wholly bent" or depraved from birth. The point would remain in the optional model of seeing our fallen situation as being *deprived* of God's empowering presence at our birth and becoming depraved due to that lack.



is how little we are likely to engage in works of mercy until we begin to curb intentionally the cravings we have nurtured for "luxuries" in clothing, food, and the like.<sup>53</sup> It is this connection between self-denial and participation in the full range of the means of grace that leads Wesley to charge that if anyone is less than *fully* Christ's disciple, it is *always* owing to the lack of self-denial.<sup>54</sup>

If self-denial is this crucial, how can we help it become a more consistent response in our' own lives and among our fellow disciples? While Wesley would insist that it is always God's gracious initiative that makes any human response possible, he was clear that God mediates this initiative through such forms as moral exhortation and argument. Thus, he was not adverse to encouraging self-denial by invoking the apparently paradoxical Christian claim that we actually find our truest happiness when we deny those urges that promise gratification, for this allows the gracious transformation of our inner urges to take place. Self-denial is actually self-care, because true happiness is inseparably united to true holiness.<sup>55</sup>

But the mature Wesley was clear about the limitations of simple exhortation. That is why he focuses on the regrettable absence of the *practice* of self-denial in his diagnostic sermon. Just as in the formation of the holy tempers, he recognized that God's grace works responsively in strengthening our sensitivity to our remaining unholy tempers and our resolve to resist them. Thus, his pastoral advice was that young Christians ought not to despair when they recognize that they lack universal self-denial. Rather they should begin practicing some type of self-denial, such as rising early to have time for prayer. As they live in this practice they will find God's grace increasing their facility. And when they recognize this they will rightly rejoice, but Wesley then admonishes them:

But do not imagine that this single point, rising early, will suffice to make you a Christian. ... It is but one step out of many; but it is one. And having taken this, go forward. Go on to universal self-denial, to temperance in all things, to a firm resolution of taking up daily every cross whereto you are called. Go on, in a full pursuit of all the mind that was in Christ, of inward and then outward holiness; so shall you be not almost but altogether a Christian; so shall you finish your course with joy: You shall awake up after his likeness, and be satisfied.<sup>56</sup>

One final advice that we might take from Wesley, then, is that a congregation led to understand that true happiness comes from the progressive denial of our distorted dispositions is more likely to witness among its members disciples who finish their course with joy-and who contribute to the good and the joy of those around them.

This is the kind of religion we truly long to see established in the world!

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, §6, p. 243. See also §I.14, p. 245.

<sup>53</sup> See Ibid, §II, pp. 245-8; esp. §II.6, p. 248. See as well Wesley's classic Sermon 50, "The Use of Money," *Works* 2:266-80.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, Intro., §4, p. 240. It is noteworthy that Wesley uses the title of "disciple" for Christians more in this sermon than anywhere else in his writing!

<sup>55</sup> The connection between our holiness and our happiness can be found throughout Wesley's works. Albert Outler finds it in at least thirty sermons (see *Works* 1:35 fn28). For examples from both ends of Wesley's career, see Letter to Mary Pendarves (19 July 1731), *Works* 25:293; and Sermon 60 (1782), "The General Deliverance," §I.2, *Works* 2:439.

<sup>56</sup> Sermon 93, "On Redeeming the Time," §III.7, *Works* 3:332.

The religious world of the 21st century rejects the authority of the scriptures. They reject God's plan for salvation for obeying the gospel, for worshiping Him, for organizing the church, and for doing His work in this present world. They reject His teaching on His kingdom and the church of the Lord. Yet, the scriptures are clear: Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth. The teaching of Christ specifically requires us to understand the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ, and the Patriarchal, Jewish and Christian dispensations. Making Disciples For the 21st Century EVANGELISM SEMINAR Dr. G. Earl Knight Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventist. The Great Commission :: Matthew 28:18-20 "All authority (power) has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Discipleship involves renunciation of oneself; It involves sacrifice for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. It involves surrendering one's own will and one's own rights to his life and acknowledging that Jesus Christ has the right to be obeyed, the right to rule. A voice is calling, "Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Matthew 3:11-12. "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, "I am not the Christ," but, "I have been sent ahead of Him." read more. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. So this joy of mine has been made full. He must increase, but I must decrease. John 5:33-35.