Abstract

The United Methodist church in Central Appalachia--Holston Annual Conference in particular--is a fractured, multi-cultural, multi-theological entity. This project is an effort to recognize the disparate ideologies involved and educate and unite them toward healing and witness based on the understood theology of our founder John Wesley. This educational model is an attempt at healing an abusive past within the congregations of Central Appalachia. It is based primarily on John Wesley’s understanding of Grace as a unifying force that develops and grows over time.

With the 1968 Uniting Conference, Methodism appears to have lost a large part of its distinctive expression of Grace and has become enmeshed or enculturated to American religious culture, a culture which, since the “Great Awakening” finds its strength in Calvinist theology. I am proposing an educational model with a pastoral approach to educate, or perhaps re-educate, from the top down to the local church level, Wesley’s distinctive idea of Grace as it came to him through Arminius. From both his own writings and current modern scholarship on the Wesleyan theology of Grace, I give a brief outline of how he came to believe and live this theology. Then I develop a brief educational model whose structure is similar to the Wesley small group or society model.

Approved ______________________ Date 26 May 2020
Advisor
Teaching Wesleyan Grace In a Fractured Post-Modern Church in Central Appalachia

by

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“May staying in love with God increasingly compel us through all the means of Grace, so that we become a means of Grace to our neighbors and to all the world.”

John Wesley
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Dedication

Clifford E. Meade, Sr. - My Father
Rev. Dr. Michael E. Williams - My Mentor
Rev. Dr. Jeffrey K. Taylor - My Friend

All three men are/were Central Appalachian born and raised. All three are/were a “means of Grace” for me and all three were “Wesleyan” in their theology, although at least one of them was unaware. They all three hold a central place in my life and heart.
Acknowledgements

While at Sewanee I have been blessed to have some excellent instructors. Among them are Bishop Joe Burnett, Dr. Rebecca Wright, Dr. Greg Ellison, Dr. Don Saliers, and Dr. Charles Stang. I wish to thank not only these listed but all the faculty of the Advanced Degrees Program at Sewanee: The University of the South as well as the staff and the wonderful brothers and sisters in Christ who have helped to educate me and who have shown me Grace greater than I might ever have realized on my own.

In 32 years of ministry in and through the Holston Annual Conference I would be remiss if I did not thank the 12 congregations that have shared my life and heart, and who have given me their lives and hearts as well. They have taught me so much. In their own ways, they have been real test cases for this work and examples in every case of how God’s awesome Grace works always for good.

The churches of Holston have raised up many great people. She raised up me, and many others of my closest and dearest friends. She did in fact help to raise up one of my best friends, Dr. Jeff Taylor and at least in part this work is dedicated to him. I made a vow to Jeff as he served my hometown church that if I ever got the opportunity to serve his home church, I would do my best by them. Jeff passed away about six years ago, and although he will never see the finished product in this life, I pray that my vow to him has been acknowledged and accepted until I see him again.

Another great man who taught me much about the Grace I have given to and received from these congregations is Dr. Michael Williams, a teacher, mentor and friend who died suddenly before I could share my project proposal and development with him. Finally is my father Clifford
Eugene Meade, Sr. the man, the myth, the legend. Appalachian born and bred, he had more Grace in his calloused, work-worn hands than every theology book I have ever read. He is proof to me that Grace can be received by proximity and I pray to be able to share Grace as he shared it with me.

I would also like to thank a very special group of people, those along the way who have been experimented on, taught and trained in “Teaching Wesleyan Grace.” To the “Faithful Few:” you have made my heart whole again by your love, Grace and friendship.

“May staying in love with God increasingly compel us through all the means of Grace, so that we become a means of Grace to our neighbors and to all the world.”

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Introduction

This writer was eight years old the year of the Uniting Conference that brought Methodist/Wesleyan and Methodist/Calvinist believers together as the United Methodist Church. That was also that year that some with Wesleyan heritage broke away from the Methodist Church and developed other denominations. As a result, I have been chasing Grace all my life. I grew up in Southwest Virginia a part of Central Appalachia that has a deeply rooted Scots Calvinist, Irish Catholic and English Anglican (primarily in the form of Methodist) theology. My interest is in pastoral practice and education and how a more “Wesleyan Methodist” understanding of Grace can strengthen efforts in treatment and pastoral practice to an area that is at once struggling with economic poverty and, some say, spiritual poverty. My first pastoral appointment was in 1989 in Tazewell County, Virginia in a mountain community known as “God’s Thumbprint” or Burke’s Garden United Methodist Church. It is a small membership congregation which was part of a three-point charge that had been torn by a previous pastor. I was assigned to help them heal; my focus there was preaching and educating about Grace. We all began to heal. I moved forward from that place focusing on treatment and pastoral care. While a student at Vanderbilt Divinity School my focus of study was pastoral care and counseling.

Due at least in part to my training in psychology and pastoral care, whether realistic or not, I have felt in general in every appointment I have served that I was assigned to “fix it.”
Since I have been the first seminary trained pastor and the first woman most of my charges have seen and heard I have worked to introduce them to the “healing power of Grace.” I continue to do that whether I serve in the local church in chaplaincy and/or treatment facilities. Seventeen of my thirty years in ministry have been in treatment modalities including Tennessee State Prison Psychiatric Chaplain II, and as a chaplain in psychiatric hospitals as well as community outpatient mental health facilities focusing on treatment for dual diagnosis within the legal system. I find the most pastoral approach is to teach Wesleyan Grace in word and deed. Since my calling is primarily to Central Appalachia, the place of my birth, I am connected to this work from infancy.

With the majority of the United Methodist Church struggling within itself over issues of polity and governance and having been on the fore-front of these issues at the last two General Conferences my struggle for Grace has grown larger. I and others see Grace as an even more central need for the church, specifically in Appalachia. I have come to see and understand that “God calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Romans 4:17 NRSV), and in my heart mind and soul I know that to be Grace.

There are a multitude of theologies of Grace. One in particular I have grown up hearing all my life is that Grace is “a gift honey, one we don’t deserve.”2 I don’t disagree with that definition; however, scripture, reason, tradition, and experience have led me to believe that Grace is that and so much more.

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I believe, and have evidence to support, that Grace does not come exclusively from somewhere up in the heavens, like a sparkling wrapped present when we are feeling especially down. Grace creates, informs, and transforms all of life.

Grace is that spark of God that lives inside us. In psychological terms, Grace is the core of our being. Grace creates self-efficacy. Some have termed it “god-esteem” and it causes us to believe in ourselves through the Holy Spirit.

Grace is participation in the divine and it both connects us to all of creation and separates us as we work out our own salvation and transformation. Grace rehabilitates us as our beliefs become our thoughts, our thoughts become our words, our words become our actions and our actions become our habits. Eventually our habits become our values and our values become our destiny.

Grace restores us to full communion with God and promotes our healing and wholeness. Grace is power, rehabilitation, esteem, therapy, healing and it is a gift free of charge from an incarnational and loving God.

While at Vanderbilt my master’s project was “Worship as Pastoral Care: An Appalachian Model.” With this doctoral project I have stepped outside the singular realm of worship and look at how our understanding of worship, the work of the people, is formed. Certainly, the Scots Calvinist and the English Methodists have different approaches to worship. I believe and have seen that those differences in worship come from the very lived experiences of the people and the pastors. I believe there is a hunger for Grace in the Central Appalachian Highlands that goes
beyond me, and those who have gone before me. There is a religious fatalism, which is attributed to the theology of Calvin, within Appalachian churches that is mirrored in the culture at large.  

The people of Appalachia have struggled with religious and scriptural abuse that stems from a poor theology, specifically a poor theology of Grace, and poor pastoral leadership. This abusive use, or misuse, of scripture ingrains poor self-esteem and lack of confidence within the people of Appalachia and leads to other abuses and cycles which repeat themselves continually in the lives of the people. Specifically, these include drug abuse and addictions, child abuse, hostility, neglect and intolerance, chronic depression, and religious fatalism.  

It is, at least in part, a lack of United Methodist clergy who are seminary trained and theologically skilled in the area of Wesleyan Grace, that continues this fatalistic approach. Ewald says, “much of mountain character and values grows out of the Old Calvinism mainly that of Old School Baptists. They viewed life as tragic, man as fragile and fallible, God as all-knowing and religion as forming a relationship with God who will save the believer through Grace, a reward for belief and works.” It is and has always been my hope to develop a pastoral educational model that involves both scriptural and spiritual discernment carried out through short-term studies with follow-up by an itinerant pastor who comes and goes in support of the appointed pastor, or one who is appointed for a year at a time to “fix things” as an interim. This is the approach I worked from in every congregation I have served. I did not go to stay forever; my job was merely an introduction and the work belonged to the people.

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Just a few words of introduction regarding the people of Central Appalachia, I am referring to a certain section and culture of Central Appalachia. The Holston Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church is a bit of land that reaches from the North Georgia Mountains to the Draper Valley in Virginia, and from the Smoky Mountains to the Cumberland Gap. The twelve individual congregations I have served as pastor have served as established congregations within the Methodist structure for at least 200 years. The oldest having was established in 1820; not one of them was established prior to the 20th century. They have all remained strong and as outposts of God’s Grace through the civil war, World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam, and any number of internal skirmishes. All have been part of at least two different states without ever moving location. Each of them, like the majority of United Methodist churches in Appalachia, is characterized as a small membership church, having fewer than 250 members. For the tenure of my appointments they averaged less than 75 in regular attendance. Churches of this size benefit from the United Methodist system and at times can become complacent, and overly dependent on the system.

Long term pastorates are rarely heard of in these congregations. There are usually many problems involved when the pastor who has remained for more than six years leaves. Pastorates of longer than four years in this area often do more damage than good. The longer the pastor serves in Central Appalachia the more likely the congregation is to develop co-dependence not only on and with the pastor but the Annual Conference as well.

Many small congregations in Central Appalachia have become known as “clergy killers” or “rabid feral cats” due to this “addictive phenomenon.” People in Central Appalachia, although often seen as closed and insular, desire to greet people with love and invite them and others into community. These churches struggle with a sense of purpose and mission to people outside the
walls of the church, oftentimes never realizing that part of the reason that people will not join them is their personalities or the presentation of their personalities. Churches like individual people have personalities, and like all people their personalities are half where they came from and the other half what they have learned. This model seeks to help churches learn where they came from by informing and instruction in church history, and then help them make a choice.

United Methodists in Central Appalachia like all other denominations struggle with their own mortality and relevance. Many of them struggle with “secret keeping” and this history of abuse has in some congregations calcified their witness. The church seeks and needs Grace, specifically, a Wesleyan interpretation of Grace.

While at Sewanee I have been blessed to have some excellent instructors. It was in Dr. Stang’s class on “Origen, Spiritual Exegesis and the Roots of Universal Salvation” that I began to pull my work at Vanderbilt together with this current project. This class helped me connect, for perhaps the first time, the ingrained Calvinism in Appalachian culture and its tussle with the Grace of Calvin and the Grace of Wesley. If nothing more people might at least benefit in knowing the difference. They might also wish to exercise their free will and choose the path they would follow for themselves. People in the congregations I have served have desired to know how to greet people with love and invite them into the congregation. They struggle with their own mortality and perhaps their own relevance.

In the following sections of this paper it is my intention to outline a cure, of sorts, for the harms that have been done to the United Methodist Church in Appalachia. First, let me say that the terms Appalachia, Southern Appalachia, Southern Appalachian Highlands and Central Appalachia are all used interchangeably to describe the same region. It is the section of Appalachia within the borders of the Holston Annual Conference in the Southeastern Jurisdiction
of the United Methodist church. This section of Appalachia serves parts of three states Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia.

The section “An Oral History of the United Methodist Church in Central Appalachia” is an introduction to the region, the culture, and some of the many wonderful congregations and people who inhabit the area and have inherited and continued the culture.

The section entitled “Wesley vs Calvin” is an attempt to look at the two primary theologies of Grace that are prevalent in the Central Appalachian Highlands, and how they have become intertwined and perhaps unintentionally been misrepresented to the people and the churches.

These two sections point toward the Educational Model / Study Guide sections which are an attempt at isolating what makes John Wesley’s interpretation of Grace healthier for the people of Appalachia. The model itself is presented in five sessions, which can be expanded to as many sessions as the leader feels necessary. This model is based on five sermons of John Wesley, all presented in Wesley’s compendium of sermons, in his personal journals and his exegetical work, and all presented as arguments against the cultural and scriptural issues he saw as prevalent in his day. I rely heavily on Wesley’s own semi-annotated writing and research. It is an attempt at a forensic look inside the mind and heart of the man who is the legitimate father of the current United Methodist Church.

Next, I look at the educational model beyond the local church and its possibilities for usage in treatment facilities, prisons, and psychiatric hospitals.

Lastly, I look at future possibilities and how the United Methodist Church might be better able to serve humanity by reclaiming the theology of our founder as well as the often-quoted theme of incorporating the entire world as our parish.
An Oral History of the United Methodist Church in Central Appalachia

There are three Annual Conferences of the United Methodist church which fit entirely within the bounds of the Central Appalachian Highlands: West Virginia Annual Conference, Red Bird Missionary Conference, and the Holston Annual Conference.

Historically speaking, the congregations whom I have served in the Holston Annual Conference have, been shaped by how they were formed and the places that are part of their existence, as is the case for all congregations.

All of the congregations I have served are named for the people who first established them, and in communities such as “Burk’s Garden” and “Wyndale” named for the families who either donated land for congregational worship or settled the community in which the church building sits.

Appalachian religious culture is an elemental force all its own. Appalachian religion, like Appalachian culture, is primarily an oral entity. How a person from the Appalachian region learns, shares, lives, and understands is much different from the way people do those same things in the dominant culture. American culture is based on a high degree of literacy. The majority, by far, of United Methodist clergy fit into the latter category. We are highly educated and for many of us we have been taught to disparage the very culture that we come from.

I myself fit into the category of a literate person, or a person of letters. In my own family of hearty Appalachian people, I am thought of as “haughty” or “better than us” because of my education.

I have spent almost sixty years as a child of a primarily oral culture and even though I am seen as “haughty” by some, the primary means through which I have given pastoral care and been in ministry is by listening and being in conversation with the people and the culture I come
from. I have nearly thirty-two years of conversation and “visitin” with the people of the churches of Central Appalachia. Their stories are more than merely important to me; that these congregations heal and grow and thrive is my life’s work.

Through listening to their “oral histories,” taking notes and keeping records, I hope to ensure that at least their faith stories live on. Some of their stories are sad, some are humorous, some are violent, and some are prophetic and visionary. All of them are given willingly as an attempt by persons to provide a personal assessment of historic events. One of my favorite stories comes from a congregation who were a primary stop for the “Underground Railroad,” and their church building is constructed in such a way as to help protect those precious, sacred, visitors. Their stories tell of their ancestors who helped carry out those resettlements. It seems that Central Appalachia was neutral during the civil war, kind of like Switzerland.

There are also stories of two gentlemen fighting over the affections of one woman. When asked to take it outside and settle the disagreement like gentlemen, one man shot and killed the other on the steps of the church. Family members of both sides continue to worship together in the 21st century. The stories go on about the women of a church literally fighting in the streets because one woman was accused of stealing another woman’s chickens. Others fought because gossip was, they were talking about one another’s families. And still others broke out in fights reminiscent of the “Hatfield’s and McCoy’s,” and decades later their descendants still worship together. Their stories are not only family history, they are faith history. As James Hopewell has

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5 Delozier, 27

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said in his book *Congregations: Stories and Structures* churches or congregations develop from the stories of their beginnings. ⁶

The people and churches of Central Appalachia have that pioneer, survivalist spirit that at times has caused them to shoot and kill even their friends and family. With all the Central Appalachian Church’s wonderful attributes, she has fallen victim to her own brokenness. In some cases, the Holston Annual Conference has allowed these stories to go unheard for the most part; their injuries, where they exist, have been allowed to fester and cause pain. The pain is not only for the congregations themselves but for appointed clergy as well. And, for all intents and purposes, the pain has been swept under the proverbial rug. Abuse, whether scriptural, theological, emotional, or at times sexual, has destroyed some of the underlying strength of these congregations. This has caused them for the sake of survival to develop an attitude not unlike that held by addicts and sexual abuse survivors: the “I love you” but “I hate you” attitude. “Come close to me but stay away.” She, the church, has developed BPD (Borderline Personality Disorder). ⁷

Prior to the modern era, all the congregations I have served were famous for their “outdoor meetings.” Almost all came of age during “the Great Awakening,” where great revivals were held in “brush arbors” and entire families traveled for miles to spend days and sometimes weeks in one location, sleeping in camps, on dirt floors, or scattered straw.

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Many small membership congregations in Central Appalachia remain in the country with limited options, unless they can heal from their pasts, draw strength from them, heal, and find new meaning and purpose in old stories.\(^8\)

According to “Mission-Insight Data” currently used by the United Methodist Church to predict growth areas and church development, a large majority of members in Central Appalachia are over the age of 75. They project this will remain the case into the foreseeable future.

Many congregants have made decisions of where to worship based entirely on history regardless of current effectiveness.

Those congregations who have a history involving “outdoor revivals” and “brush arbors” have passed down a conflicting theology of Calvin through the Methodist-Calvinist George Whitefield. Although an Oxford graduate and ordained minister he excelled in the outdoor brush arbor environment. It is Whitefield who brought the idea of “new birth,” “double blessing,” and Calvinist understanding of Grace to the new world and to Central Appalachia. Every Methodist congregation in Central Appalachia has been impacted by Whitefield and through him by Calvin.

John Wesley disagreed so much with Whitefield’s Calvinist leanings that Wesley disavowed him and his teachings primarily on Grace. This split, and the interpretation of both Calvin and Wesley, remains in the United Methodist Church in Central Appalachia. Primarily

\(^8\) Delozier, 16.
through the Southeastern Jurisdiction it continues to be a point of contention throughout the global Methodist Church.
A Map of the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church with Numbered Districts
Wesley versus Calvin

In 1804 Methodism began to spark in Blount County, Tennessee and beyond. Methodists joined the Presbyterians and the Quakers. The country and the Central Appalachian communities were a hotbed of political and spiritual upheaval, bickering and feuding. ⁹

I reiterate that most congregations in Central Appalachia were sites of some of the famed camp meetings that spread like wildfire through the Southeast and brought American Methodism to the masses. It does not pass by this writer without notice that the oldest houses of worship in these perceived wilderness places were the Scots Presbyterians who aligned themselves with John Calvin, followed by the Arminians whom John Wesley aligned himself with and about half a decade later the Quakers.

These relatively small communities were hotbeds of political and theological discussion, with the loudest voices being those of Calvin and Wesley. This theological debate begun decades earlier took root in this central Appalachian Communities and grew as it had much earlier in Europe. Since the Presbyterians arrived first, it is only fair that we make a simple sketch of the theology of Calvin and compare that with the theology of Wesley, with special emphasis on both interpretations of Grace.

I take a moment of personal privilege to be open and honest at this point. I am biased: I am a child of Central Appalachia, and most of my gleanings from Calvinism are a byproduct of the part of my family who are Primitive Baptist, and my Presbyterian friends who have offered a more genteel application of Calvin’s thought. After all these years I find that I still choke on the

⁹ Delozier, 13.
concept that God has set elect among us and those who are not elect by their outward signs are condemned never to see the glory of heaven. I lean toward an expansion of Arminian/Wesleyan thought which causes me to believe, preach and live as one who believes in her heart and soul that God loves us all and has elected us all to salvation by Grace which unites us and moves us ever closer to reconciliation with all of creation. It is my understanding that we are all simply walking one another home, and that home is reconciliation with God to which we are all heirs. Still I agree as Thorsen states in his book *Calvin vs Wesley: Bringing Belief in Line With Practice* that I am not attempting to lift Calvin above Wesley or Wesley above Calvin. Both believed in the primacy of Grace. However, the interpretations of that Grace are quite different and following one or the other will take us down vastly different paths.¹⁰

John Wesley was part of a new enlightenment. He synthesized Eastern and Western Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism, Calvinism and Arminianism, tradition and innovation, reason and experience, spirituality, and service. Wesley was a serious student of the Eastern mystics of the Early Church. He was fond of Macarius of Egypt and Origen of Alexandria.

This is the religion of the primitive church, of the whole church in the purest ages. It is clearly expressed in the small remains of Clements, Roman’s, Ignatius, and Polycarp; it is seen more at large in the writings of Tertullian, Origen, Clemens, Alexandrius and Cyprian; even in the fourth century it was found in the works of Chrysostom, Basil, Ephraim, Syrus and Macarius ¹¹


Buried within the theology of the present United Methodist Church are remnants of Origen passed down through generations, buried there by the same mindset that attempted to silence Origen’s voice. If we the United Methodist Church pinpoint and reunite those bits and pieces, it will I believe, provide healing for the church at large, the United Methodist Church in general, and the congregations of Central Appalachia in particular.

Specifically, there is a theology of Grace that both Origen and John Wesley held in common. I struggled in class with understanding Origen’s theology of universal salvation as a movement upward as in, hierarchical. Since Dr. Stang’s class I have come to understand that it is an upward movement of Grace like the stages of Grace, or continual growth in Grace which is the core of Wesleyan theology.

Thorsen also suggests that most mainline Christians (the UMC being one of the largest groups) believe like Calvin and yet act like Wesley. His thesis is that if we understand this phenomenon, we can pull ourselves in line with what we truly believe.\textsuperscript{12} It is my hope that we United Methodists follow the path that our founder John Wesley set before us. Specifically, Wesley writes in his journal:

\begin{quote}
Wednesday May 3, 1738. My brother had a long and particular conversation with Peter Boehler. And it now pleased God to open his eyes; so that he also saw clearly, what was the nature of one true living faith, whereby above “through Grace” we are saved. Wednesday, May 24. In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ; Christ alone for Salvation; and an assurance was given to me, that he had taken away my sins even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death. Friday May 26. My soul
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} Thorsen, 14.
continued in peace but yet in heaviness, because of manifold temptations. I asked Mr Telchig, the Moravian, what to do. He said, you must not fight with them as you did before, but flee from them the moment they appear, and take shelter in the wounds of Jesus -John Wesley

Much has been written and passed down through the years of the experience that Wesley writes about. That moment he realizes that Grace warms us to love, and I interpret that to mean in Wesley’s thought that love and Grace were inseparable and continue to be inseparable.

Calvinists believe that Adam and Eve disobeyed God and tasted the apple of forbidden knowledge, and as a result of this “original sin” of disobeying God’s command, all humans are born into sin. Under this system of belief God must punish us for our sins. We must be ashamed of our wrongdoing, and we all must require the harsh punishment or discipline of our heavenly father. Although John Wesley also believed in the “original sin” of all humanity, he did not believe that we are all irredeemably sinful. In fact, he believed that God’s Grace redeems us, an prevenient Grace restores us to the place of free will and helps us all be capable of reuniting with God. Not only are we capable of reuniting with God but we are able to grow in Grace and become more nearly perfect than we are.

Calvinism grew out of a time in Europe when Industrial Capitalism was beginning to make its impact on the world. The “five tenants” of Calvinism identified for those who believed those tenants that those who did well in the world of Capitalism were certainly of the Elect, and those who did not -- the poor, the outcasts, the prisoners -- were not elect and thus condemned by God to hell, and in effect there was nothing that could be done about it. The religion became

woven to the fabric of government, and that fabric was transferred to the new world by the European Calvinists who brought their election to the United States. 14

Methodism has had much to be proud of since its beginnings in the early days of the New World. Societies of Methodism were begun as early as 1769 in New York and Baltimore. In 1784 the Christmas Conference launched the Methodist Episcopal Church as an independent religious group, and soon after its launching Methodism began to spread like wildfire as the country itself grew, and expanded Methodism itself grew. The growth in Methodism is said to have become indigenous to the culture it became intertwined with. Almost since its inception, Methodism in America has closely identified with the dominant culture in America, perhaps more so than other mainstream denominations. Radical changes in the American culture have sent the same type of earthquakes through the Methodist Episcopal Church. Before the time of the civil war the Methodist Episcopal Church divided into the northern and southern branches even as this nation did. The Methodists divided over slavery in 1844, long before the start of the Civil War. In 1939 the northern and southern churches, along with the Methodist Protestants who had split in 1828, became the Methodist Church, pulling together to overcome adversity just as this country had done earlier. In 1968 the Methodist Church united with, perhaps swallowed whole, the Evangelical United Brethren Church, just as our country had done over the last century and as American business continues to do. Since 1968 the now United Methodist Church, like most other forms of American society has become heavily urbanized, and now the church is deepening

its roots in the dominant culture to reach toward “baby boomers,” “millennials,” and other groups. With its legion of seminary-trained clergy Methodism has bought heavily into Augustinian, Calvinist, Barthian, and Schleiermachian theology. The church has become, as American society has, extensively analytical and linear in its thought, action, and dogma. As American society has become more print and technology-oriented people have pulled away from one another and have become more isolated and self-centered.\textsuperscript{15} Society has also pulled away from the church in general.

These changes in and of themselves are not necessarily problematic if we accept that religion is a culturally based phenomenon, but if our intent is to form larger and stronger faith communities, and the area of service we propose to do this in is central and south central Appalachia then we indeed have a problem. Appalachia continues with the Calvinist tradition, began by George Whitefield who led the Calvinist Methodists against the Wesley brothers.

The United Methodist Church, it has been said, has no particular “theology;” rather it is the polity of the United Methodist Church which keeps it together rather than a homogeneous theology. I disagree that we have no theology. At least in Central Appalachia, it is merely cloaked. Because of Whitefield, Calvinism and by virtue of that Augustinian beliefs have been the theology that has been passed down through Central Appalachia. By extension, this system keeps the “haves” on top and the “have nots” on the bottom, both spiritually and economically. By comparison, Arminian/Wesleyan thought came out of a time in Europe which countered the industrial capitalism of the day and encouraged transferring or transmitting Grace to those who

were poor, in prison, the least, last, and lost. The Calvinist teaching of predestination, Grace and divine initiative broke from the Wesley's emphasis on free Grace and free will. They differed in their understanding of the human role in the process of salvation. We Methodists offer, through Wesleyan thought, a way for all to be elect if they choose it, regardless of their economic status. Strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, there are many Methodist buildings in Central Appalachia that continue to be shared by Baptists (Calvin) and Methodists (Wesleyan). Sometimes they worship together in one service and in other situations they merely share the same building. At times this “building sharing” is not even understood to be taking place. I grew up in such a congregation, called “Lakeview Union.” I remember wonderful worship services and especially Vacation Bible Schools the memories of which give me spiritual strength even today. It is true, however, that the United Methodist Church serving Appalachia (Holston, West Virginia, and Red Bird Missionary Annual Conferences specifically) is a somewhat different church because of the Appalachian influence. Methodism, the United Methodist Church, is not doing enough spiritually, theologically, or educationally to strengthen the people of Appalachia. Many of the clergy who are sent to the Appalachian regions of the church are either sent there because they are being punished for some wrong they have committed, or they are not considered sufficiently educated to function elsewhere. This is contributing to a spiritual poverty in Appalachia which is equal to, or greater than, the social and economic poverty of the area. What Appalachia needs is clergy who are not less educated, but more educated. It needs clergy educated in the cultural differences of Appalachia, the pastoral approach of differing cultures, and a religion based on the theology of Wesley/Arminius and not dogma or politics.

In his sermon “Free Grace” Wesley states that:
The Grace or love of God, whence cometh our salvation, is free in all, and free for all. 1) It is free in all to whom it is given. 2) The doctrine of predestination is not a doctrine of God. 3) Predestination destroys the comfort of religion, the happiness of Christianity. 4) This uncomfortable doctrine also destroys our zeal for good works.5) Furthermore, the doctrine of predestination has a direct and manifest tendency to over-throw the whole Christian revelation 6) and at the same time, makes that revelation contradict itself. 7) Predestination is a doctrine full of blasphemy. It is not the predestination that I hold: I hold only the election of Grace. What I believe is not more than this…

In this sermon Wesley takes on Calvin and, at least for me, negates the doctrine of predestination. Ultimately Wesley argues that God’s love is free to the world, and that God agonizes over our souls. He goes on to say that he hates a doctrine that says God banishes some to hell and others to heaven. He states emphatically his assumption that the love or Grace of God is free in all creation and for all creation.

It has been more than fifty years since John F. Kennedy brought the nations attention to an isolated section of America and promised if they would elect him President of the United States then he in turn would help them. I personally benefitted from Kennedy’s promise, as I was one of the first sixteen children chosen from Appalachian homes to pilot a new “Head Start program” that promised more education to the families of the region. Many things have changed in Appalachia, and much has remained the same.

Appalachia has always been a land of contrasts. My people settled in the Central Appalachian highlands as early as 1750. The farmland was rich then and full of possibilities. Life was hard, but my people were never hungry. They were proud, self-sufficient, and very much place and family oriented. Appalachian people are known for their strength and their

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ability to survive through a close relationship to the land and a strong faith in God. In truth “there are few Appalachian atheists because Appalachians need God.” 17

Any church or denomination that attempts to reach the people of Appalachia must do so by intentionally rooting itself and its purpose within the “word of God” as found in the scriptures of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Anything else will be doomed to failure before it begins. Sadly, the only way to reach the church in Appalachia is to work through the cultural religion of its people. In the words of Loyal Jones, “it was the church which helped sustain us and made life worth living in grim situations. Religion shaped our lives, but at the same time we shaped our religion. Culture and religion are intertwined.” 18 Although the United Methodist Church in Appalachia has also been impacted by the culture it has not nor is it reaching persons in Appalachia for Christ. My grandfather was an underground coal miner when coal mining was not unionized. The miners used to carry a canary underground with them; when the canary died from over-exposure to methane, or other toxic gases, the miners knew that it was time to get out.

The United Methodist Church has all but ignored the growing “irrelevancy” of the church in the life of Americans. Almost every section of Methodism is beginning to suffer from the growing deficit in spirituality. Many other agencies and companies are using Appalachia for experimentation. Perhaps the church should do this too. There must be something we can do to prevent the spiritual impoverishment of a denomination. The church is starving in Appalachia. Perhaps these are a few reasons why:

Colonial theology

17 Bruce Ergood and Bruce E. Kuhre, eds. Appalachia: Social Context Past and Present (Iowa:
Promotion of uniformity-instead of unity with diversity

Paternalistic attitudes

Condescending attitudes

In 1772 the western frontier of this new land that was called America by pioneer explorers was Southwest Virginia (and upper Northeast Tennessee), which is almost dead center to the 6300 mile stretch of land encompassing twelve states which is commonly called Appalachia, Appalachian, or Southern Appalachian Highlands. Methodism had its beginnings in this area -- the Southwest Virginia frontier -- when a young man by the name of Edward Morgan came into this new frontier from England. He was appalled by the violence and lawlessness. Edward begged Bishop Asbury to help improve the spiritual life of the area. Bishop Asbury, it is reported, told Edward Morgan to “come back and do the job himself.”19 He did and the Methodist church grew by leaps and bounds during the frontier times, securing a place for Methodism as a strong hold from that time until now. But what about now? Methodism has no strong hold now, and no one seems intent to determine why, or what, if anything, can be done to change things. But one thing is certain, without a strong Wesleyan Methodist presence “the religion of Appalachia became fatalistic and stressed rewards in another life.”20

Appalachian people and Appalachian settlers are as varied as the wildlife and vegetation that make up the region that is commonly known as Appalachia. There are, however, some identifiable peculiarities about these people. We are strong, intelligent and loyal. We come from

18 Ergood and Kuhre, p. 170.
a stock of Scots-Irish immigrants and Native American blood that creates in the people of Appalachia an unexplainable, and almost mystical tie to the land and to one another. If disregarded, or totally dismissed, this could create a lack of communication which regrettably could lead to no communication. If communication stops in the church the results can be devastating.

The earliest settlers who moved westward from the coast were of Scots-Irish descent and were in large part Celtic. These early settlers were a people with a particular and distinct set of values. They worked and lived under a European peasant ideology and were influenced greatly by Celtic mysticism. They were distinguishable by characteristics of individualism, familism, life in harmony with nature, and religiosity.  

These characteristics still hold true with persons in Appalachia; whether because of isolation, stubbornness, or pure resistance to change, these are still the founding characteristics of Appalachian people. Only since 1960 has this region begun to move from an oral based to a literacy-based culture. And even now, due in part to the strength of orality, Appalachian religious culture, and the culture in general is still resistant to change.

This resistance to change is seen most strongly in the religious practices of Appalachian persons. Appalachian people may have been bought into the dominant culture, but the religion and religious practices of the people are still based in orality. Appalachian religion -- particularly in rural Appalachia -- is the most particularly Appalachian cultural/social institution. Religion,

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20 Ergood, p. 170.
the church, in the Appalachian region has taken over for family in its extended kinship system. Now instead of sitting around the hearth passing down stories of our ancestors, Appalachian people sit around the altar passing down stories, belief systems, and social structures.

Many facets of Appalachian culture may be fading away or evolving into something new, but Appalachian religion is not fading away to any new kind of materialism or dominant culture religion. Instead religion in Appalachia is growing stronger and more independent of the mainstream of American culture and consequently to mainstream Methodist churches.

...much of mountain character and values grows out of the Old Calvinism mainly that of Old School Baptists. They viewed life as tragic, man as fragile and fallible, God as all-knowing and religion as forming a relationship with God who will save the believer through Grace, a reward for belief and works...

And although there are probably as many denominations in Appalachia as there are anywhere else, and as many varied beliefs, all of them have that same rural flavor, and that stamp of Calvinism that has hung on through the ages, perhaps the way a June bug holds on to a string when you try to make it fly.

At their best Appalachian people are loners and they are separatists; at their worst they are stubborn and violent to the point of dismissing all outside input or assistance. They detest to be looked down upon and refuse categorically to allow themselves to be told what to do. At

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22 Photiadis, p. 296.
23 Photiadis, p. 171.
25 “Oral History” A game my Grandfather taught me when I was a child “you tie a string to a Junebug’s leg and try to make it fly.”
times it is difficult for Appalachian people to accept seminary trained clergy. Sometimes it is easier if the clergy person is “one of their own,” a local person who has done well but has not become too “uppity.” “They have not gotten above their raisin.”

In any event it takes a good five to six years for an outsider to be accepted in Appalachia, and much of their acceptance depends on how they are received and accepted by the community. Pastors in Appalachia are no exception to this phenomenon, and they must work hard and have a high degree of visibility. If they do not work hard, they will not be accepted by the community and they will not be accepted by the congregation. Mountain people will not tolerate laziness on the part of anyone, whether it be themselves, their family, or especially their pastor. At times pastors who are also loyal to the denomination suffer because it is difficult to pastor a multi-church charge and be part of conference activities; hard work must be coupled with strong personal and professional boundaries.

Religion in Appalachia today is at its best by attempting enculturation, and it serves the community best by attempting to help persons accept and internalize the values, beliefs, and way of life of Appalachian persons. The United Methodist Church is not currently attempting to pass on these (Appalachian) cultural values, but the values of the dominant culture. In this the United Methodist Church bears a strong resemblance to other outsiders who have tried to buy and sell Appalachia and its people, i.e. coal companies, steel factories, government installations such as Oak Ridge National Laboratories, Radford Arsenal, Holston Defense, and Eastman Corporation.

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26 “Oral History” A phrase that my father and grandfather used to describe someone who had forgotten where they came from.
Such institutions have taken much more than they have given. Methodism demands its askings but refuses to return pride, dignity and Wesleyan education to the people it professes to serve.

Methodism has become in the last twenty years a carbon copy of the government and dominant culture -- a culture that does not always translate well in Appalachia. If we, the United Methodist Church, could manage to preach Wesleyan theology and faith development we stand a better chance of being able to speak to a culture that has a strong sense of the sacred. Although religion is important, faith is more important. “Religion is concerned about institutions (churches) documents, statement of belief (Bible and creeds) and our convictions and moral codes. Religion is important but not ultimately important. Educationally religion is a means not an end; faith is the only end.”27 If people are to learn, grow and change then those who lead them must begin where the people are, and we all must learn the difference between TULIP and ACURA.

In the English-speaking world, the five points of Calvinism are often summarized by the acrostic TULIP: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace and Perseverance of the Saints. These five points of understanding have as their foundation the theology of Augustine. 28


28 Thorsen, p. 140.

29 On the other hand the theology of Wesley has its foundation from the theology of Arminius and can be viewed through the acrostic ACURA: (1) All are sinful, (2) Conditional election, (3) Unlimited atonement, (4) Resistible Grace, and (5) Assurance of Salvation. This acrostic highlights the key points of difference in Wesley and Calvin and when examined more closely shows Wesley as more practical and less systematic. Being less systematic is one of the dynamics that gives Wesley’s understanding of grace more freedom. Thorsen, p. 47
I will not break down and compare every point by point, but suffice it to say that the five points of Wesley have as their foundation Arminius, and although they are similar, in many ways they are different. Wesley, did not believe in total depravity but rather that without God we are lost, but due to God’s prevenient Grace we are restored and transformed. Another difference is that there is security in God’s Grace but by “free will” we can also reject God.29

The theology of Calvin and that of Wesley are remarkably similar with at least one glowing difference: the election of Grace and how that Grace manifests itself in the life of believers. To highlight, John Wesley was a serious student of the Eastern mystics of the Early Church. He was especially fond of Macarius of Egypt and Origen of Alexandria. When Wesley met the Arminians on his way to the Americas, he changed his understanding and position of the ladder of Grace and salvation completely. Origen, Wesley, and Arminius held specifically in agreement a theology of Grace that included “Universal Salvation” and that both Grace and Salvation were completed in a movement upward through a continual growth in Grace. A growth that looks like this:

“Prevenient Grace
Justifying Grace
Justification
Conversion
Sanctifying Grace
Sanctification
Glorification” 30

It is said that Wesley gleaned from Origen the possibility of perfection in this life and that became the primary tenant of Wesleyan theology as opposed to Calvinism.

I too believe that God’s Grace is free to all and like John Wesley I believe that it is a gift that is free for all and that we indeed can reach perfection in this life. Tragically, I also believe that the current situation within the United Methodist Church and in the larger political arena that is the United States of America is a theological debate that continues between Calvin and Wesley. It is this debate that is tearing apart the very fabric of the United States and the United Methodist Church, and one that I have found in microcosm within the churches I have served. We have become merely diverse entities that co-habit under the same umbrella from time to time. This phenomenon can also be seen within the larger United Methodist Church and when scrutinized closely the current governmental system of the United States of America. We can do something to fix it, and that is what this model proposes in a rudimentary way.

Points of Agreement between Calvin and Wesley

1) God is Sovereign

2) God is Omnipresent and Omnipotent

3) Biblical Foundation of Creation Coming from God

4) The dilemma of evil’s origin

Differences in Calvinism and Arminius

**Calvin**

Total Depravity

Unconditional Election

Limited Atonement

Irresistible Grace

Perseverance of the Saints

**Arminius**

Total Depravity

Prevenient Grace

Atonement for all

Resistible Grace

Security in Christ
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>John Calvin*</th>
<th>John Wesley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Depravity</strong> - Human beings are so affected by the negative consequences of original sin that they are incapable of being righteous, and are always and unchangeably sinful; human freedom is totally enslaved by sin so we can only choose evil.</td>
<td><strong>Deprivation</strong> - Human beings are sinful and without God, incapable (deprived) of their own being righteous; however, they are not irredeemably sinful and can be transformed by God's grace. God's preventive grace restores to humanity the freedom of will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unconditional Election</strong> - Since human beings cannot choose for themselves, God by His eternal decree has chosen or elected some to be counted as righteous, without any conditions being placed on that election.</td>
<td><strong>Conditional Election</strong> - God has chosen that all humanity be righteous by His grace, yet has called us to respond to that grace by exercising our God-restored human freedom as a condition of fulfilling election.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Limited Atonement</strong> - The effects of the Atonement, by which God forgave sinful humanity, are limited only to those whom He has chosen.</td>
<td><strong>Unlimited Atonement</strong> - The effects of the Atonement are freely available to all those whom He has chosen, which includes all humanity, &quot;whosoever will.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Irresistible Grace</strong> - The grace that God extends to human beings to effect their election cannot be refused, since it has been decreed by God.</td>
<td><strong>Resistible Grace</strong> - God's grace is free and offered without merit; however, human beings have been granted freedom by God and can refuse His grace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perseverance of the Saints</strong> - Since God has decreed the event, and they cannot resist grace, they are unconditionally and eternally secure in that election.</td>
<td><strong>Assurance and Security</strong> - There is security in God's grace that allows assurance of salvation, but that security is in relation to continued faithfulness; we can still defiantly reject God.</td>
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</tbody>
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31 Thorsen, 2013
Educational Model/Study Guide

God’s Grace is the only reason I can keep going for without it I am doomed. There have been times when I wondered how God could still love me -a sinner-... When I returned to God it’s like one of my favorite songs, “When God Ran.” He runs to me enfolds me in his arms and welcomes me home-again and again... and because of his Grace I must be the person he wants me to be. To show others Love and Grace and tell them the Good News of Jesus.”

On May 24, 1738 John Wesley’s experience changed his life forever and began the renewal within the church that has become known as a “Wesleyan-Arminian theology.” This theological system exists because of “oral history” and has been largely inferred from various sermons, theological treatises, letters, journals, diaries, and hymns.

The truth is that Wesley’s writing was not annotated and did not make true “Wesleyans” out of everyone who has continued to bear his name and who honors him as patriarch. The editors of numerous editions of his works hope that more ample annotations will help both Wesleyans and non-Wesleyans in their discovery of the richness and sophistication of his parochial sort of folk theology.33

This basic model is one way we can contribute to help Wesleyans and non-Wesleyans understand more fully the theology of John Wesley as well as Arminius, Macarius, and Origen and many other theologians of Grace, who have been overlooked and underestimated.

32 “Oral History,” The Church of Central Appalachia.

Although we might also find the language of Anselm in Wesley, there is even more that stresses the notion of healing “therapeia psyches.”\textsuperscript{34} We can use that healing language to heal Central Appalachia.

It is most important for “Wesleyans” and others, to discover how much our founder learned from the Christian past; as we learn from that past and our past we can also learn for ourselves the importance of truly being at home in our past and work toward a more perfect future.\textsuperscript{35}

The model being proposed is based on Wesley’s theology of Grace as found in his sermons, letters, and other writings. It should be used from the top down. This is counter intuitive to what Wesley understands of Grace, I know, but it is most important that the Annual Conference and current pastors are aware of the concepts of a Wesleyan understanding of Grace and its potential for healing and spiritual growth.

I would propose that this model be used during Local Pastors’ School and lay training events to get the information to larger groups of people. When this training at the upper level is complete then it can be moved into individual congregations, where we can expect multiplication of “Wesleyan Grace.” For some who participate the information will be completely new and perhaps a little foreign. There will potentially be a struggle with the information, but perseverance will at the very least give a deeper understanding and dialogue with “Wesleyan Grace.”

\textsuperscript{34} John Wesley, “Original Sin” (1759), in \textit{Works}, 2:184.

\textsuperscript{35} Katherine Simmons Conolly, “A Wesleyan Understanding of Grace as Responsible and Therapeutic: A Path to Transformational Spirituality (D.Min. dissertation, George Fox University, 2002)
We can expect some differences in the participants but there are expected to be many more similarities among participants regarding age, gender, race, education, economic status, and sexual orientation.

The Educational Model is based on a qualitative approach incorporating learning from a range of sources and results in a fluid collection of data. The research instruments include four main aspects and a primary model used in oral history data collection. 1) A verbal demographic survey 2) pre-test and post-test (verbal and written) 3) focus group work pre-, during and post-, 4) and the leaders journaling as participant observers.

Participation in the groups is completely voluntary as is attendance. However, such self-selection could be a limitation for research conclusions, if they are to be made based on participants. The data might show less change because participants might have a long-standing interest in the concept of Wesleyan Grace with considerable prior experience and knowledge.

The methodology consists of a multi-faceted learning approach that engages audio visual and kinesthetic methods and embraces a variety of senses. This approach is in harmony with Wesley’s well-known emphasis on mind and heart as well as Appalachian methods of learning.

The group can be taught at any time established by the leader and the group. It can be over a five to six-week period or in one long weekend session.

A participant’s involvement in the group may be constituted as permission to use their information or “oral testimonies” observed and written, in order to preserve information for better learning and teaching potential for future participants.

A study guide for each session is attached to the sessions. Outlines and handouts are also included; these can be added to as the leader feels led.
Study Guide

When using this guide, it is important to tell your group that you are the study leader, not the teacher, and that you will all be learning from one another. The purpose of this study guide is to assist you in leading group participants to explore the suggested materials and questions to gain an understanding of both the Wesleyan Understanding of Grace and the Calvinist Understanding.

1) It is always important in church work to ground the study biblically. Every session is set up as a worship service and the Bible is one of the primary references.

2) It is important to build community with the class as you begin. There will be participants from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. You will need to establish trust and openness to different points of view.

3) A variety of teaching methods may be used and are illustrated in this guide. Several activities are designed for small groups. Personally, from my experience, the group experience works best if we allow people to form into groups naturally as they choose.

4) Create outlines for the sessions. You will find that one is detailed with possible lengths of time allotted, and one is a condensed outline for group participants.

5) Encourage additional reading.

6) Make assignments at the end of each session in order to be prepared for the returning session.

Prepare the room. Create an environment of learning by placing posters and pictures and worship areas around the room.
Session I

On Grace

“Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight” (Romans 4:7, NLT)

On January 7, 2019 I wrote in my personal journal a recall of a dream that I had had the night before. It was a dream of falling and I found in one of my many books an interpretation that states: “falling in a dream represents a fear of falling from ‘Grace’ or out of Love.”

I noted for myself that “our position in the Grace or love of God is secure, perhaps our experience of God’s Grace is not...there is a loss of recognition of God’s Grace in our society...there is an over adherence to the law...”

The key emphasis of the theology of John Wesley relates to how Divine Grace operates within the life of individuals. Wesley divined the way of salvation as the operation of Grace in at least three parts: Prevenient Grace, Justifying Grace, and Sanctifying Grace.

Prevenient Grace is that Grace that goes before us. It is that power which enables us to love and motivates us to seek a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In Prevenient Grace, Wesley believed that “it was God’s desire that we might sense both our sinfulness and God’s offer of Salvation.”


37 Peggy Meade, Personal Diary, 2019.

Justifying Grace or Accepting Grace is that Grace, offered by God to all people. It is the Grace that we receive by our trust and faith in Christ. Justifying Grace is what we receive from God despite our sin, and it allows us to grow close and be received by God in spite of our fallen nature. When we receive this Grace, our guilt is cancelled, and we are strengthened to resist the power of sin and completely love God and our neighbor. (Matthew 22:37)

John Wesley called this experience the New Birth. The experience of Justification can happen in two ways, in a transforming experience or across a period of time.39

Sanctifying Grace is that Grace which sustains believers in the journey toward Christian Perfection: a genuine love of God with heart, soul, mind and strength, and a genuine love of our neighbor as ourselves. (Matthew 22:37) Sanctifying Grace enables us to respond to God by leading a Christ-like, spirit filled life aimed toward love.

John Wesley never claimed the state of perfection for himself but insisted that the attainment of perfection was for all Christians. It was this belief that separated Wesley from Calvin (and other early reformers), who denied that humans would ever reach a state in this life where they could not fall into sin. John Wesley believed that people could lose all their inclination to evil and gain perfection in this life.

In psychological terms Wesley’s understanding and belief in perfection is like the self-actualization stage of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. When base needs have been taken care of

then higher needs emerge. Sanctifying Grace is that which causes us humans to "want to become the most that we can be"\textsuperscript{40} perfected and completely reconciled to God.

Wesley did however reject the notion of eternal security or "once saved always saved." He did believe that salvation can be rejected. Wesley emphasized that we believers must continue to grow in our relationship with Christ through the process of sanctification.

One of the primary outgrowths of Wesleyan theology is the dedication of United Methodists to the Social Gospel and the Social Principles of our church. Our founders’ concept of Grace is what moves us Methodists to Social Justice. Grace moved us to the forefront of women’s suffrage, abolition, labor rights, civil rights, ministry to the poor, restorative justice, and the mitigations of addictions, child abuse, child neglect, and elder abuse.

Grace is the very foundation of where we are from, who we are, and where we are going. The people of Central Appalachia and the United Methodist church in general need to know and to have a choice in which understanding of Grace they will follow. If there is a theology that calls people away from fatalism, and opioid addiction, just to name a few of the ills of Central Appalachia, then it is necessary that we help them/us learn. It is necessary that they have a choice. It is necessary that the United Methodist Church take this idea seriously.

Albert Outler notes that ‘Wesley the evanglist, Wesley the organizer and Wesley the social reformer are all familiar figures, but what has gone largely obscured is Wesley the

theologian. Evangelical Christians with little to no ties to John Wesley take his theology, specifically his theology of Grace, more seriously than does the United Methodist Church.

Calvin’s theology in particular is considered to be more intellectually satisfying than Wesley’s. However, it is fortunate that there are those of us who consider Wesley’s thought to be more liberating. I personally considered Wesley’s theology to be more liberating and more in depth than that of Calvin. A devoted body of Wesleyan devotees have helped to sustain and refine Wesley’s thought over the past two centuries.

John Wesley is an imminent theologian of Grace. Wesley makes an excellent and major contribution to Christian theology with his emphasis of the Grace of God in every phase of a person’s life. Wesley’s contribution to an understanding of Grace is long overdue, especially in Central Appalachia.

Wesleyan Grace at its core is about relationships: relationships with us, with God, and with others. It has been developed as a Wesleyan-Arminian theology, and is inferred from various sermons, theological treatises, letters, journals, diaries, and hymns.

Let us look further at a Wesleyan concept of Grace and what it can mean for us today, especially those of us who call Central Appalachia home.

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Session I Overview

Romans 4:17 - “On Grace”

Goals:

- Develop a language/terms to discuss the theological term Grace
- Calvin or Wesley- you decide

Teaching Point:

- What do you believe Grace to be

Recommended Times:

- 10 minutes- Opening-Devotional
- 20 minutes- Open Discussion
- 20 minutes-Holy Communion
- 20 minutes-Open Discussion
- 10 Closing-Words of Grace
- 10 -Journal Assignment

Materials:

CD player
A copy of the Bible for all
Writing Implements /Flip Chart
A table/podium
Dialogue - childhood:

1) What was the role of religion in your family?

2) Was religion/Grace a positive experience or negative one? In what ways?

3) How do you feel about “the church” today?

4) What words come to mind when you think of the church?
Session I

Goal:

To examine what we know and understand about Grace, where we have learned what we know, our biblical perspective on the topic, and how that grows into our everyday lives.

Supplies:

Newsprint, felt-tip markers, masking tape, ball of yarn, glue sticks, colored paper, name tags, Bibles (at least three different versions), signs with words “Strongly Agree” and “Strongly Disagree,” copies of handouts for each participant for Session I, copies of handouts for assignments.

Getting Acquainted:

Getting Connected:

This activity is to help with connecting names, faces and stories. It is a game used in Youth events throughout the Annual Conference. We throw a ball of yarn to participants and have each person cut of a length of yarn. For each inch of yarn each participant must tell one thing about themselves and what brought them to the group.

Suggestions for sharing might be name, age, birthdate, region grew up in, favorite song, favorite scripture.

As We Begin:

Before the class on a large sheet of Newsprint write the phrase “Grace Is:”

As people arrive have paper and markers near the door. Ask each person to write a word or phrase to complete the statement. When all are finished have them introduce themselves to the group, read out loud what they have written and attach it to the board.
Personal Inventory:
Complete and Discuss the Worldview Questionnaire

Meditation

Scripture

Holy Communion

Hymn - Amazing Grace

Wesley’s Covenant Prayer

As We Continue:

Before the group meets, place two signs - Strongly Agree and Strongly Disagree on opposite sides of the room, tell group members you are going to read a statement. They are to move closer to one sign or the other or anywhere between those two points, in order to express their position.

After reading each statement asks participants to state why they took the stand they did. If they are positioned in different a place, which is more than likely, ask for a response from someone in each grouping.
Ideas to write about Grace

What is Grace to you?
Initial pre-class, pre-test Questionnaire

1) I believe there is a God
2) God loves Me
3) God put me on earth for a reason
4) God created all things
5) I stand up for my religious beliefs when they are questioned by others
6) If I am sorry, I can be forgiven by God for the things I do wrong
7) God loves me the way I am
8) I say a prayer or blessing before I eat
9) There is a heaven waiting for me
10) I live out of my beliefs by helping others
11) I forgive others when they hurt me
12) God cares about even my smallest problems
13) It makes me happy to be close to God
14) When I am upset, I remind myself that God loves me
15) God comforts me
16) My belief in God gives my life meaning
17) I have a close relationship with God
18) My beliefs about God help me decide what to do in bad situations
19) When trying to solve a problem I ask God for help
20) When I do something wrong, I ask for God’s forgiveness
21) I find teachings about God interesting or helpful
World View Questionnaire\textsuperscript{43}

1) God comforts me. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

2) My belief in God gives my life meaning. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

3) I have a close relationship with God. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

4) When struggling I ask God to help me understand. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

5) My beliefs about God help me decide what to do in difficult situations. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

6) When trying to solve a problem I ask God for help. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

7) My faith gives me hope in tough times. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

8) When I face a problem, I pray for God’s help. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

9) Praying gives me strength when I am upset. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

10) When bad things happen, I try to figure out what God is teaching me. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

11) My faith gives me feelings of peacefulness. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

12) I confess my sins to God. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

13) Knowing God is with me keeps me from feeling lonely. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

14) When I do something wrong, I ask for God’s forgiveness. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

15) When I am worried my faith helps me calm down. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

16) I find teachings about God interesting or helpful. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

17) My religious beliefs make me happy. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

18) I talk with others about my religious beliefs. \hspace{1cm} 1 2 3 4 5

\textsuperscript{43} Hopewell, p. 203.
19) I give others spiritual advice. 1 2 3 4 5
20) I read books about God (other than the biblical scriptures). 1 2 3 4 5
21) I watch religious TV shows or movies. 1 2 3 4 5
22) I volunteer to help others based on my religious beliefs. 1 2 3 4 5
23) I say scriptures to myself when I am upset. 1 2 3 4 5
24) I attend prayer groups. 1 2 3 4 5
25) I listen to religious songs or poetry about God. 1 2 3 4 5
26) I give money based on my religious beliefs. 1 2 3 4 5
27) I study/read scriptures. 1 2 3 4 5
28) When I need help, I go to people with my same religious belief. 1 2 3 4 5
29) I spend time with kids who share my religious beliefs. 1 2 3 4 5
30) I struggle when defining Grace. 1 2 3 4 5

The scale 1-5 denotes never true to always true: with never, sometimes, neither, often, always corresponding to the numbers 1-5.
Session II

Free Grace

“He that spared not is own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things.” (Romans 8:32)

“Thanks to God, Grace is free we don’t have to ask for it or work for it... by Grace you have been saved through faith not of yourselves. Grace has helped me get through this troubled time at church and pray it will give me peace.”

“We can do absolutely nothing to deserve it, a true gift of God. Knowing that there is an unlimited amount, I have only to ask and be willing to receive the unmerited and insurmountable gift from God! My heart’s desire is to use and spread the word of God’s remarkable Grace.”

John Wesley’s sermon #128 “Free Grace” was preached in Bristol England in 1740. In the beginning lines of the sermon there is a disclaimer:

To the Reader Nothing but the strongest conviction, not only that what is here advanced is ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’ but also that I am indispensably obliged to declare this truth to all the world, could have induced me openly to oppose the sentiments of those whom I esteem for their work’s sake: At whose feet may I be found in the day of the Lord Jesus!

The sermon was basically a response to the Calvinism that he heard and saw in the sermons of his good friend George Whitefield. Whitefield circulated a pamphlet entitled “Free Grace Indeed” and Wesley goes on to say that:


46 John Wesley, Complete Works, Volume 3, p. 160.
I cannot answer his tract till he appears to be more in earnest. For I dare not speak of the deep things of God in the spirit of a prize-fighter or a stage-player. 47

Wesley yearned to speak openly and face to face with his friend and fellow clergyman, but their differences kept them apart, logistically, for the rest of their lives. Their relationship was similar to Peter and Paul when the decision was reached that one take one missionary journey and the other go in the opposite direction. Whitefield, chose the Americas and Wesley although having made a trip to Georgia, decided to stay and provide reform for his beloved Church of England.

The sermon is outlined as a logical argument and Wesley’s entire understanding of Grace is found within. “Free Grace Indeed” is in actuality a letter written by Whitefield to Wesley in response to another sermon of Wesley’s entitled “Against Absolute Election.” 48

Wesley and Whitefield had been close friends in the Holy Club and in ministry; both were Methodist. They began the Methodist Awakening in Britain together.

Their conflicting notions of Grace is what separated their friendly relationship and caused a schism that broke their relationship and continues today in the church they both loved.

Wesley’s sermon “Free Grace” was a convincing moving manifesto denouncing the Calvinist doctrine of predestination as blasphemous. In Wesley’s own words: “For it made the God of love to be a God of hate.”49

49 John Wesley, Complete Works, Volume 3, p. 160.
He argued that any doctrine of unconditional election (humanity has no choice—we are either saved or damned) and limited atonement (Jesus died only for the ones he would save) denies all the scripture that claim God loves all.  

Wesley goes on to argue in this sermon that Calvinism leads people to living unholy lives, that Calvinists live lives of fear without assurance of faith and Arminians never doubt their assurance.  

-The Grace or love of God whence cometh our salvation, is Free in all and Free for all.  
-It is free in all to whom it is given, it does not depend on any power or merit in a man, no not in any degree, neither in whole, nor in part, it does not in anywise depend either on the good works or righteousness of the receiver; not on anything he has done, or anything he is, it does not depend on his endeavors. It does not depend on the good tempers or good desires, or good purposes and intentions, for all these flow from the Free Grace of God. They are the streams only not the Fountain.  

This Grace feud between the Wesleys and George Whitefield was the first split and parting of the ways in Methodism. It was the first division over theological differences. Those same theological differences are evident in the Methodist church of today. They are exceptionally profound in Central Appalachia where time seems to have stood still.

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50 John Wesley, Complete Works, Volume 3, p. 160.
Whitefield and Wesley eventually learned to respect each other again, despite their incredibly different theological frameworks. They did not however come back together as they once had been.

It appears that instead of separating based on those different theological frameworks, we American Methodists, specifically in Central Appalachia, have attempted to bind the two together again. We have grafted Calvinism into the very plantings that were established in the name of Wesleyan Methodism. These graftings have created weaker plants than were initially established. We have lost that rich notion of the Christian life that Wesley knew and experienced from the Eastern fathers. To the Eastern mystics the Christian life was actual participation in the divine.

Grace for Wesley and for me is a cosmic concept that causes us to be present with and for God in this life. It creates purpose and mission and helps us reach inward, outward and upward, as we strengthen our spiritual life and become a means of Grace for others.

It is in this participation in the divine life that Wesley had already understood the mysteries of Grace and free will, as prevenient Grace as the Holy Spirit’s constant initiative of perfection as a process rather than a completed act.\(^5^3\)

Wesley continued in his argument:

“This then is a plain proof that a doctrine of God, because it makes void the ordinance of God; and God is not divided against himself. A second is that it directly tends to destroy that holiness which is the end of all the ordinances of God. I do not say that none who hold it are holy; (for God is of tender mercy to those who are unavoidably entangled in errors of any kind) but that the doctrine itself—that every man is either elected

or not elected from eternity, and that one must inevitably be saved, and the other inevitably damned-has a manifest tendency to destroy holiness in general.”

Wesley went on to argue, and I agree that the doctrine of election so prominent in Calvinist theology is: “an effectual bar to their finding any comfort or happiness, even in the religion whose ways are designed to be ‘ways of pleasantness and all her paths peace.’”

I am heartbroken that the people of Central Appalachia in large number have not heard the words of hope that John Wesley espoused in his theology of Grace and have been left with the theology of Calvin as a poor substitute.

I, like Wesley, love those whom I disagree with, but I do not accept the fatalism that has been left in my beloved homeland. And I repeat Wesley’s question:

And as to you who believe yourselves the elect of God, what is your happiness I hope, not a notion a speculative belief, a bare opinion of any kind; but a feeling of possession of God in your heart, wrought in you by the Holy Ghost, or, the witness of God’s Spirit with your spirit that you are called a child of God. This, otherwise termed “the full assurance of faith,” is the true ground of a Christian’s happiness. And it does indeed imply a full assurance that all your past sins are forgiven, and that you are now a child of God. But it does not necessarily imply a full assurance of our further perseverance. I do not say this is never joined to it, but that it is not necessarily implied there in; for many have the one who have not the other.

What do you believe about Grace? Is it for some and not for others? Does it strengthen you for the journey or leave you without happiness or hope?

54 John Wesley, Complete Works, Volume 3, p. 164.
55 John Wesley, Complete Works, Volume 3, p. 164.
56 John Wesley, Complete Works, Volume 3, p. 164.
Session II - Overview

Romans 8:32 - “Free Grace”

Goals:

- Develop language/terms to discuss the theological term Grace
- Election or free will - you decide

Teaching Point:

- What do you believe about Grace?

Recommended Times:

- 10 minutes- Opening-Devotional
- 20 minutes- Open Discussion
- 20 minutes-Holy Communion
- 20 minutes- Open Discussion
- 10 Closing- Words of Grace
- 10 - Journal Assignment

Materials:

CD player
A copy of the Bible for all
Writing Implements / Flip Chart
Table/Podium
Dialogue- childhood:

1) What was the conversation your family shared about Grace?

2) Was religion/Grace a positive experience or negative one? In what ways?

3) How do you see Grace in your life?

4) What “feelings” come to mind when you think of Grace?
Session II
Romans 8:32- “Free Grace”

Election or Free Will

Goal: To begin exploring and defining the difference(s) between Election and Free Will.

Preparation:

*Copies of the United Methodist Hymnal

*Copies of Handouts for the session:

3 x 5 cards in two different colors for all group members.

* Set up table for debaters in front of room.

Have a designated chair for timekeeper. Have available the following: Newsprint, markers, masking tape, bibles, copies of Wesley’s sermon “Free Grace.”

*Four sheets of newsprint with the following headlines

1) Root cause of Sin

2) Responses based on biblical principles

3) Responses based on Wesleyan Tradition

4) Responses based on Calvinist Tradition

Mediation

Hymn: “Wrestling Jacob”

Wesley’s Covenant Prayer

Looking at the Facts:

Wesley vs. Calvin (Debate)

Closing Discussion/Statements

Assignments
Ideas to write about Grace

What does the term “Free Grace” mean to you?
The Means of Grace are Spiritual Practices

Wesley’s Five Means of Grace\textsuperscript{57}

1) Prayer
2) Searching the Scriptures
3) The Lord’s Supper
4) Fasting
5) Christian Conferencing

Five Marks of a Methodist\textsuperscript{58}

I. A Methodist Loves God

1) In your spiritual formation, which of the two commandments (love God, love others) is currently calling for greater attention? Why?

2) How have you found the love of God to be the orienting center for your discipleship?

3) Consider how new birth is where discipleship begins, not ends. How have you found this to be so?

II. A Methodist Rejoices in God


1) Reflect on the phrase “discipleship is a whole-life response to Grace.” What two or three thoughts come to your mind?

2) Respond to the statement, “Joy is the mark of discipleship that gives us courage and confidence.

3) Why do you believe that reconciliation with God is crucial in giving our joy its proper meaning?

III. A Methodist Gives Thanks

1) Where have you found it challenging to give thanks?

2) What is your dominant concept of God? How has it helped shape your discipleship?

3) Where do thanksgiving and prayer currently intersect in your life?

IV. A Methodist Prays Constantly

1) How does the idea of prayer as a response to God affect the way you pray?

2) Have you made use of liturgical prayer? If so, how have you found it to be helpful in your prayer life?

3) What does “pray without ceasing” mean to you, and how do you attempt to put the admonition into practice?

V. A Methodist Loves Others

1) God loves you “in order that _______?”

2) Can you hit a target without aiming? Can you be a fruitful disciple by acting on hunches or impulses?

3) Where do your discipleship and your vocation currently intersect?
Session III

Justification by Faith

“However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, Their faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:7 NIV)

Faith stories are how we begin to recognize the blessing of God’s Grace in our lives. John Wesley loved sharing his story of faith with special emphasis on being saved from a rectory fire as a young child, as well as his life changing experience at Aldersgate.

People in Central Appalachia are familiar with storytelling; after all, they have been sitting around the country store and family reunions for decades reliving stories. It strengthens the soul to look at God’s Grace working in our lives.

I reach past the void.  
The nothingness – to be joined  
With all that is.  
A solitary speck becoming part  
Of the great ‘I Am’

Joining the ‘mystery’; the ‘magic’  
Of the unspoken cries  
Of thousands who lift their  
Voices to God.

‘those who wait upon the Lord will  
Renew their strength’.  
Did God say that?  
No, it was Isaiah!

Should I say that? No let him  
Speak for himself-I should  
Speak for me, and only those  
Others who ask, who plead  
For ‘one voice crying in the  
Wilderness-may way?’

Did God say that? No, I did and  
Countless thousands who have been  
Forgotten, left behind, struggling
To find the ‘mystery’ the ‘magic’ that
Is Almighty God- so that
We might worship...
‘In Spirit and In Truth’

John Wesley believed that our transformation as people of faith was uncoerced. It is to him a joint effort between the Holy Spirit and our response to its promptings.

Wesley believed, wrote, and taught that our Faith in what God has done in our lives is what saves us and provides a reference for the beginning, the genesis, of our movement toward perfection.

Narrative and story are particularly important in my life. Narrative, telling my faith story, is as natural to me as hearing those stories of my ancestors. Story is especially important to the people, like me, of the Southern Appalachian Highlands. For religious people, retelling the stories of faith ancestors as well as biological ancestors helps us see God’s gentle leadings in our life.

In my life I have often been defined by others by my differences. I was born in Southwest Virginia the second daughter of a public-school bus drive/third generation tobacco farmer. I am the only one of five children born in Dante, Virginia and one of the last children born in Clinchfields Coal Miners Hospital. I’m told that a few days after my birth it burned to the ground never to be rebuilt. I’m the first college graduate in my family and I am female; I was told it was not possible for a girl to go to college. I am one of 16 children in Russell County, Virginia who

60 Katherine Simmons Conolly, “A Wesleyan Understanding of Grace as Responsible and Therapeutic: A Path to Transformational Spirituality” (D.Min diss., George Fox University, 2002).
were chosen to take part in the very first Head Start program in this country, thanks to Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. I have never not loved learning. I am a graduate of Oberlin Divinity School at Vanderbilt University and that is just a small part of my faith story and the pattern that so far Grace has made in my life.

Through the Holy Spirit, Grace becomes the power, help, or energy of God. It, the moving of the Holy Spirit, in the lived experience of human lives molds Wesley’s conception of Grace.  

“I get it now…please share with the group that I get it. What you and Gerald have tried to get across to us all…I get it. I didn’t want to be here but if jail is where I need to be for God to work on me then I’ll stay. Remember when I told you about the tree and how mad I was when I hit it and the police caught me? Hitting that tree was God’s Grace. It stopped me when I was about to really hurt some other people…kids…I’m ready to listen now. God’s Grace saved me.”

In Wesley’s sermon “Justification by Faith” published around 1745 he outlines in his 18th century vernacular how God’s spirit can guide us to faith, and how it does.

Wesley’s theme for Justification and ultimately Sanctification is strongly connected to the “deification” seen in Origen and other Eastern mystics, which means that the life of God in the human soul is participation of the divine nature. Holiness as the work of the Holy Spirit is sanctifying and perfecting the ‘creation.’ The believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit not possessed

61 Conolly, p. 15.
and as such human souls grow in nature and can become perfect in God's love, if God works in us, and we are convinced of God's love.\textsuperscript{63}

In this sermon Wesley sets out to prove that the only "instrument of Salvation is faith" and by "faith man is justified to God."\textsuperscript{64}

Following the theme of the Eastern Fathers, Macarius and Origen particularly he taught that our faith in our justification was the first and necessary step on the way to perfection. He believed that by Faith in God's redemption or justification of us that we could be sinless.

"But when a (soul) would forthwith reach perfection so that every root of evil is completely cut off from it to the point that no trace of evil can be found in it, at that point the summit of blessedness is promised the one to whom the Lord would be able to impute no sin"\textsuperscript{65}

Justification does not mean we have reached a state of perfection. Being justified does not mean that we have done no wrong. It does not even mean that we humans will not mess up again. Justification does not instantly bring about behavioral change. It is a difficult theme to understand and to teach but it goes something like this: All humans deserve punishment for the times we've broken God's law, and yet God chooses not to inflict such punishment on those who by faith are justified.


\textsuperscript{64} John Wesley, \textit{Complete Works}, Volume 1, p. 59.

\textsuperscript{65} John Wesley, \textit{Complete Works}, Volume 1, p. 59.
Wesley's explanation of Justification is the backbone of "Restorative Justice" born from the heart of Wesleyan Theology.

He (Wesley) outlines Justification in this sermon like this:

1) How a sinner can be justified before God…contains the foundation of our hope.
   A) What peace can there be when our own heart condemns us

2) This important question has not been easily understood, confused and utterly fake

3) To do justice I will try to show:
   A) The foundation of the doctrine of Justification.
   B) What is Justification
   C) On what terms are we justified
      (1) Humanity was created in God's image
      (2) We once dwelt in Love
      (3) We were given a perfect law.
         (a) do not eat the fruit
      (4) In paradise we were completely loved and happy
      (5) we disobeyed God
         (a) we became dead to God
         (b) death passed to all humans
      (6) In this state "God so loved the world…"
(7) As the son of God tasted death for everyone, we have all reconciled to God.⁶⁶

If we break through the antiquated language and pay close attention, we will hear words that are good for us all -- the Southern Appalachian Highlands and beyond.

To everyone who is part of this broken world, to all those who feel helpless, listen, and hear the good news. There is a place that we can go to find healing! Go to God. Do not try to convince God of your righteousness or that you’re worth forgiving. Go to God and acknowledge that you are one of the broken, hurting, the lost and sinful, the grieving and struggling and know that God justifies the ungodly. We don’t have to have done anything right in our lives. God loves and yearns for us to be near.

I was so ashamed, all alone, and so far away.
But now I know, that He’s been waiting for this day. I saw him run to me, He took me in his arms, held my head to his chest, said ‘My son’s come home again!’
Lifted my face, wiped my tears from my eyes, with forgiveness in his voice I felt his love for me again.
He ran to me.⁶⁷

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Session III- Overview

Romans 4:5- “Justification by Faith”

Goals:

- Develop a language/terms to discuss the theological term Justification
- What stage of Grace is Justification?

Teaching Point:

- What are the stages of Grace as defined by John Wesley?

Recommended Times:

- 10 minutes- Opening-Devotional
- 20 minutes- Open Discussion
- 20 minutes-Holy Communion
- 20 minutes-Open Discussion
- 10 Closing-Words of Grace
- 10 -Journal Assignment

Materials:

CD player
A copy of the Bible for all
Writing Implements /Flip Chart
Table/Podium

Dialogue-

1) What does Faith mean to you?
2) Where are you on your faith journey?
3) How does your faith inform your life?
4) Give an illustration of your faith in action
Session III

Romans 4:5- "Justification by Faith"

Goal:

To hear stories of the life of faith in individual congregations and persons

Preparation:

Set the room up in the round so that everyone can be part of the “storytelling” community.

Setting the Stage:

The group leader will tell their “faith story” demonstrating and then tell the group: as you share your faith stories remember the steps toward healing begin by telling truths.

As you listen to one another’s stories, put yourself in the position of the person telling the story. What are your responses?

Listen in order to respond:

Give biblical examples of faith stories

a) Moses b) David c) Mary the Mother of Jesus d) Paul

Questions for Discussion:

1) What are your feelings as you listen to the story?

2) What do each of these stories say about the persons faith story?

3) What role can you play where conflict has not been resolved?

4) When two people disagree theologically how is that to be resolved within a congregation?

Reflecting on Personal Inventory:

Ask each group member to review the World View Questionnaire from the first session.

78
1) Have you gained insights?

2) Have any previous concepts been confirmed?

3) Have new questions been raised?

Meditation

Holy Communion

Wesley’s Covenant Prayer

Assignments for next session
Ideas to write about Justification

What is Justification by Faith?
Session IV

On Perfection

“Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection: not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and faith toward God.” (Hebrews 6:1)

John Wesley in his sermon # 76 “On Perfection” quotes this verse from Hebrews as he says “the whole sentence runs like this”68 He goes on to break down another sermon/argument aimed not particularly at Whitefield this time but at all who were not convinced that Christian perfection was possible.

He lays out his argument succinctly, line by line, and incorporates the Wesleyan Quadrilateral (scripture, reason, tradition, and experience) into his argument.

Ultimately, he wanted his hearers to know that Christian Perfection was possible and he was determined to seek after it. This particular branch of Wesleyan theology has been picked up more than most in Central Appalachia but not by the United Methodist Church. It is the Holiness denomination, a branch off the Wesleyan Church from the early 1860’s that holds to this idea. It seems that their interpretation is that Perfection/Salvation happens instantly and afterwards you work really hard not to lose it.

My grasp of Wesleyan Christian perfection is that it most often happens gradually like climbing the rungs of a ladder upward. I can only believe that this is what Wesley gleaned from the writings of Paul and particularly the book of Romans.

Of the four legs of the Quadrilateral on Perfection the weakest one for Wesley seemed to be “experience.” He acknowledges that Christian Perfection is rare, not seen often but that it is possible. He is as sure of this as he is of the sovereignty and authority of God.

I too believe that it is rare to see a human being reach perfection in this life, and yet, I have seen it. Wesley had experienced it as well and believed that the working toward it was a guiding principle for all Christians and especially for his clergy.

She was living perfection. We are going to miss her mightily, not just because we loved her but because she loved us. She taught us how to love and we’re gonna miss that around here. She was what we Methodists have been working toward since John Wesley brought it up. She was the example of Christian perfection. She was ‘love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance.’ She reached that perfect state right in front of us, and our experience of her is what we all are to strive for. Ms Bettye was Perfect.69

This dear woman is not the only experience of Christian Perfection that I have known but she stands out. Wesley did not name his examples in life but pulled them from biblical references; not particularly but that they did exist. In his sermon he says: “Agreeable to this is the plain matter of fact: several persons have enjoyed this blessing, without any interruption for

many years. Several enjoy it at this day. And not a few have enjoyed it unto their death, as they have declared with their last breath, calmly witnessing that God has saved them from all sin till their spirit returned to God.”

He emphasized that the perfection he held was not in opposition to that held by the English church of his day. As a matter of fact in answer to fellow clergyman Roland Hill’s tract, he stated emphatically and at some points in large emboldened letters that:

“The Perfection I hold is so far from being contrary to the doctrine of our church that it is exactly the same which every clergyman prays for every-Sunday.
‘Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may PERFECTLY LOVE THEE and WORTHILY MAGNIFY thy Holy name.”

Sadly, I feel that I am a clergy member in a denomination that, despite some exceptions, has lost touch with its roots. We have also lost sight of our founder and his hope that we would spread holiness and Christian perfection and not become an empty giant. We have retained some parts of the “Methodist” brand when it comes to polity: year end reports, church committees, hierarchical structures, and an obsession with membership statistics as well as the chit-chat of potlucks and coffee hours. The political posturing of recent General Conferences has replaced the soul sharing of class meetings and spiritual development. We have lost John Wesley’s mission to spread Grace, holiness of heart and Christian perfection to all.

To aim for anything other than holiness of heart and life was anathema to John Wesley. When he was asked, “who is a Methodist, according to your account?” he answered: “A

Methodist is one who has ‘the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him: one who loves the Lord his God with all his heart and with all his soul, and with all his mind and with all his strength.’ 72

The definition of a Methodist was also his definition of Christian Perfection. This is not just a message the church in Central Appalachia needs to hear. It is a message that all of Methodism needs to hear and heed.

Wesley did not think that he had attained perfection or even that every Methodist was perfected. He did not even think that the majority of Methodists were or would become perfected. He was merely setting out his vision of the Christian life, the goal towards which we should be growing.

Wesley believed that, by the Grace of God, we could be transformed “in heart and life so that we were inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God.” Perfection is what we are all to aim for. Anything less was and is unacceptable.

John Wesley was shaped by England’s social circumstances, the Church of England, his upbringing, his life experiences, and his devotional practices, as each of us is. However, the influences on his life led him to believe that Grace is therapeutic. In other words, it does not just cover up the sin, but its power transforms us from the inside out.

Wesley grew up in conditions similar to those of people of Central/Southern Appalachia. The Church of England, like the Calvinism of Appalachia, preached that man’s station in life was a reflection of his state of Grace…in this world of little hope and options, John Wesley came

72 John Wesley, “The Character of a Methodist” (1742), in The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John
into the world and appeared on the scene. He and his Grace filled theology became a social conscience for England and for the Church.  

Appalachia deserves as much from the current “Methodist” church.

In “On Perfection” Wesley says it best: “And why should you be afraid of, or adverse to what is naturally implied in this; namely the offering up all our thoughts, words and actions as a spiritual sacrifice to God, acceptable to him through the blood and intercession of his well-beloved son, surely you cannot deny that this is good and profitable to men as well as pleasing to God.”

Let us not be afraid to mount the ladder toward perfection. It is no difficult; God has already done the work. It is by faith not works that we are saved. Trying harder will not make us better -- it is always a matter of trusting more deeply. We do not begin in the Spirit and then work out our salvation by our own energy. It is by Grace through faith from the beginning to perfection.

In Post-modern terms perfection begins when we give our life as we know it to our higher power, acknowledge that we are powerless over our imperfections and give them and ourselves over to God. When we can do that then we are able to begin our climb up the ladder toward perfection.

I wish, no I pray, that there were more examples like Ms. Bettye so that we could all learn and grow toward that longed for perfection.

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Session IV - Overview

Hebrews 6:4- “On Perfection”

Goals:

- Develop a language/terms to discuss the theological term Perfection
- What did Wesley believe and teach about Perfection?

Teaching Point:

- John Wesley believed in the “eastern mystic” journey toward Perfection. Do you?

Recommended Times:

- 10 minutes- Opening-Devotional
- 20 minutes- Open Discussion
- 20 minutes-Holy Communion
- 20 minutes-Open Discussion
- 10 Closing-Words of Grace
- 10 -Journal Assignment

Materials:

CD player
A copy of the Bible for all
Writing Implements /Flip Chart
Table/Podium

74 John Wesley, Complete Works, Volume 1, p. 9.
Dialogue-

1) Is it possible to reach perfection in this life?

2) Are you striving toward perfection?

3) In what ways do you hope to be made perfect?

4) How does the scripture speak to the idea of Perfection?
Session IV

Hebrews 6:4- “On Perfection”

Goal:

To look at ways in which others are working toward “perfection.”

Where do we go from here with our personal commitment?

Preparation:

Handouts of Historic Questions

The United Methodist Hymnal

Meditation

Holy Communion

Wesley’s Covenant Prayer

What does it mean for us:

1) Are there areas in your life that you could change?

2) Are your beliefs compatible with Jesus Teachings?

Making a Difference:

How can we make a difference in the life of the community?

Issues before the Global Church

Working for Change

Service of Commitment
Ideas to write about Perfection

Do you believe it is possible to be made perfect in this life?
John Wesley and the Holy Club's 22 Questions

1) Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?

2) Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate?

3) Do I confidentially pass on to others what has been said to me in confidence?

4) Can I be trusted?

5) Am I a slave to dress, friends, work or habits?

6) Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?

7) Did the Bible live in me today?

8) Do I give the Bible time to speak to me every day?

9) Am I enjoying prayer?

10) When did I last speak to someone else of my faith?

11) Do I pray about the money I spend?

12) Do I get to bed on time and get up on time?

13) Do I disobey God in anything?

14) Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?

15) Am I defeated in any part of my life?

16) Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy or distrusted?

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17) How do I spend my spare time?

18) Am I proud?

19) Do I thank God that I am not as other people, especially as the Pharisees who despised the publican?

20) Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold a resentment toward or disregard? If so, what am I doing about it?

21) Do I grumble or complain constantly?

22) Is Christ real to me?
Wesley’s Historic Questions

(These historic questions are found in the 2016 Book of Discipline and have been asked of those being ordained since the beginning of Methodism)

1) Have you faith in Christ?

2) Are you going on to perfection?

3) Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?

4) Are you earnestly striving after it?

5) Are you resolved to devote yourself wholly to God and his work?

6) Do you know the General Rules of our Church?

7) Will you keep them?

8) Have you studied the doctrines of The United Methodist Church?

9) After full examination, do you believe that our doctrines are in harmony with the Holy Scriptures?

10) Will you preach and maintain them?

11) Have you studied our form of Church discipline and polity?

12) Do you approve our Church government and polity?

13) Will you support and maintain them?

14) Will you diligently instruct the children in every place?

15) Will you visit from house to house?

16) Will you recommend fasting or abstinence, both by precept and example?

17) Are you determined to employ all your time in the work of God?

18) Are you in debt so as to embarrass you in your work?
19) Will you observe the following directions? (a) Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed. Never trifle away time; neither spend any more time at any one place than is strictly necessary. (b) Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time. And do not mend our rules, but keep them: not for wrath, but for conscience’ sake.
Session V

Salvation by Faith

For it is by Grace you have been saved, through Faith-
And this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- (Ephesians 2:8 NIV)

Wesley’s sermon “Salvation by Faith” was first preached at St. Mary’s Oxford on June 11, 1738. Wesley ranked this sermon #1 in his compendium of 44 sermons.

I am not a great theologian, so I will let others expound on the details of this. But I believe this sermon presents a pretty basic idea that is at the very heart of Christianity and particularly Wesleyan Christianity. It was passed from Paul, through Wesley, to those of us who consider ourselves to be Wesleyan and to many others who do not consider themselves as such, at least not yet.

This is the core doctrinal principle, salvation by faith; in this sermon Wesley makes the statement “at this time more especially will we speak, that by Grace ye are saved through faith; because never was the maintaining this doctrine more seasonable than it is today.”

Wesley, of course, lays out his complete argument discussing every possible objection to the theology he presents. He looks at one typical objection to the doctrine of salvation by faith, “that to preach salvation or justification by faith only is to preach against holiness and good works.” And his response or retort to that objection is: “it would be so if we spake as some do, of a faith which was separate from these.” Which emphasizes for me and I assume other

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76 John Wesley, Complete Works, Volume 1, p. 2.
77 John Wesley, Complete Works, Volume 1, p. 7.
78 John Wesley, Complete Works, Volume 1, p. 5.
Wesleyans that it could and should be presumed that “salvation by faith” was a Christian doctrine and that Methodists are Christians.

He expounds further with his argument that “this then is the salvation which is through faith, even in the present world: a salvation from sin and the consequences of sin, both often expressed in the word justification which taken in the largest sense, implies a deliverance from guilt and punishment by the atonement of Christ actually applied to the soul of a sinner now believing on him...”\(^{79}\) and more specifically: “at this time more especially will we speak, that by Grace ye are saved through faith: because never was maintaining this doctrine more seasonable than it is this day."\(^{80}\)

Although these words were first preached about 238 years ago, I believe they are just as prudent today, and I agree with Wesley that maintaining this doctrine has never been more right than at this moment on this day in this time. I echo his words and thoughts when he says:

“Christian faith is then not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ, a trust in the merits of his life, death and resurrection.”\(^{81}\)

Wesley goes on to preach that even Satan knows that the power of God is given to all those who have faith. As Christian people, Wesley believed and taught and preached, that in my post-modern Central Appalachian language it is up to us, we Christians we Wesleyans even to make the world a better place. It is the church’s responsibility to stand up and make sure the


\(^{80}\) John Wesley, *Complete Works*, Volume 1, p. 3.

\(^{81}\) John Wesley, *Complete Works*, Volume 1, p. 10.
world is a better place. John Wesley believed “that orthodoxy (right belief) leads to orthopraxy (right practice). For Methodists Holy Living is the goal of the Christian life.”\textsuperscript{82} And holy living is what heals us and helps us be a means of Grace for others.

Wesley believed so strongly in the power of “salvation by faith” and the Grace it releases that he preaches: “For this reason the adversary so rages whenever ‘salvation by faith’ is declared to the world. For this reason did he stir up earth and hell to destroy those who first preached it, and for the same reason, knowing that faith alone could overturn the foundations of his kingdom, did he call forth all his forces.”\textsuperscript{83}

In order to combat the raging of Satan and transfer Grace, Wesley established class meetings. Historically speaking, small group meetings can be traced back to Medieval times. There was a remnant of Moravian bands or fellowships that survived the Medieval period in Christianity. They have been known as “Unitas Fractum” or “fractured unit.” This group had as its most famous leader Count Nikolaus Ludwig Von Zinzendorf. His leadership created the “Banden” or small fellowship groups of people who were committed to a disciplined life, striving for personal holiness.

John Wesley and his father Samuel before him, belonged to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge-to promote Christian education and personal holiness. From his experience with these group structures Methodist class meetings began. \textsuperscript{84}


\textsuperscript{83} John Wesley, \textit{Complete Works}, Volume 1, p. 10.

\textsuperscript{84} Watson, 1986.
Class meetings were not United Methodist Women or Sunday School classes. They were groups of 7-12 people who met weekly and their primary purpose was to further transformation in their own lives and in the lives of other people.

The goal of the classes was essentially the same as that of early Methodism itself, to be transformed by the Grace of God, to become and “altogether Christian.”85 Their primary question was “How is it with your Soul?”86

In 1776, Methodists accounted for 2.5% of the religious adherents in the colonies. It was the second smallest of the major denominations at the time. In 1850 Methodists comprised 34.2% of religious adherents in the United States which was fourteen percent more than the next largest group.

Class meetings played an integral part in this growth. In those classes people who had come to faith in Christ would be with a group to help them to grow in their faith and where they would learn to practice their faith. 87

I have no doubt that this class meeting structure would and can help heal the spiritual poverty of the people called Methodist in Central Appalachia. The classes are especially helpful to counter Calvinist images of God such as:

“God can put you down in a second...be careful and be grateful, for what you’ve got”88

“He’s homeless because he’s lazy, he just needs to get a job and get over hisself”89

85 Watson, 1986.
86 Watson, 1986.
87 Watson, 1986.
“The poor man can never get ahead”90

“There is only one problem, I’ve never really felt holy. I have never seen myself as holy. I’ve never really felt I could be classified as holy.”91

In truth, everyone can get ahead, everyone can be transformed and for those of us who are Orthodox Wesleyans, we know that Grace is free, it is given to all and our faith in that is our ticket to freedom, hope, transformation and healing.

Grace is free, free at birth, our inheritance from a loving creator.

May the people of Appalachia find that gift in the Grace they have been given. May we all recognize and find that gift even in the very lives we have lived and continue to live.


Session V-Overview

Ephesians 2:8-Salvation by Faith

Goals:
- Discuss your Faith
- What did Wesley teach about Salvation by Faith?

Teaching Point:
- What comes to your mind when you think of Salvation by Faith?

Recommended Times:
- 10 minutes- Opening-Devotional
- 20 minutes- Open Discussion
- 20 minutes-Holy Communion
- 20 minutes-Open Discussion
- 10 Closing-Words of Grace
- 10 -Journal Assignment

Materials:
CD player
A copy of the Bible for all
Writing Implements /Flip Chart
Table/Podium

Dialogue- childhood:
1) What does it mean in your family to have Faith?

2) Is Faith a positive coping skill?

3) Does Faith strengthen your life?

4) Give an example of how Faith has sustained you in difficult times
Session V

Ephesians 2:8- “Salvation by Faith”

Goals:

What did Wesley Tech about Salvation by Faith?

What comes to your mind when you think of Salvation by Faith?

Meditation

Holy Communion

Service of Dedication

At the end of this session prepare for the continuation of this group to the next level.

Development of ongoing Covenant Groups
Ideas to write about Faith

Where are you in your Faith Journey?
The Educational Model- In other Contexts

Of the 31 years I have been in Ministry in the United Methodist Church 18 of those have been in prisons, psychiatric facilities, and within the treatment modality. It has always been especially important to me to relate what I do and what I believe, outside the walls of the “church.” As I work with this model it is particularly important to me that it be transferable to the world in which most of my ministry takes place. This context for me allows me to echo the words of John Wesley: “The world is my parish.” This is the arena in which I feel I always do my best work. Since December of 2018, my work has taken me back to treatment as a Chaplain/Therapist in Community Mental Health in Central Appalachia. The same area which has been ravaged by drug abuse, illegal activity, theological and scriptural abuse, is the same area where the denunciation of religious fatalism is part of the development of this model in the first place.

In 1967, a novel idea began to develop, that of “wholistic healing,” and the ability that counseling could have on the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing of individuals. The theory I am speaking of was developed by Rollo May. May wrote a book about his theory and research called The Art of Counseling beginning with a group of student workers through the Methodist Episcopal Church South in Arkansas and North Carolina. May writes specifically about personality development, how human personality and “church” personalities develop in similar ways. We have already briefly discussed this phenomenon using James Hopewell’s work, but prior to Hopewell, May concluded; based on his research and work that “it is possible to grow in freedom. The more mentally healthy the person becomes, the more he is able to mold creatively the materials of life, and hence the more he has appropriated his potential for
freedom.” And he goes on to say that: “It is the function of the counselor to lead the counselee to an acceptance of responsibility for the conduct and outcome of his life.”

I am going out on a limb a little bit to say that Grace as Wesley saw it is freedom within the human spirit, and the more spiritually healthy we humans are the more Grace lives within us and the stronger we grow in Grace, the more we move toward perfection. It is the healing power of Grace that transforms the individual “church” and the Church.

It is the function of the clergy to lead the laity to accept responsibility for their own conduct and outcome of their spiritual lives. Methodist clergy are not just appointed in congregations, some of us, such as me are chaplains, counselors and therapists who work in varied settings, but it is the Church as Wesley led.

Prisons and mental health facilities are concerned with “what people believe as well.” Part of every intake, whether in prison or mental or physical health facilities, is a world view psychosocial questionnaire which asks the client what they believe. What religion they hold to? What manifestation of faith do they lean toward? We hope that we can find a solution to “what ails them.” Is what is ailing us, nature or nurture? These questions, like those in Wesleyan small groups, are meant to treat the whole of a person, to inquire if you will, “How is it with your soul?” For Wesleyans, the answer to that question is nurture, for Calvinists that same question is answered by nature. The metaphorical nurturant parent is the one who can help those trapped by

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93 May, 52-53.
social, economic, and even theological systems. This picture is inconsistent with the strict father figure of Calvinism.  

John Calvin forged a theocracy, a society, where only the leaders of a particular religion could be leaders in government, John Wesley helped move beyond the limitations of a government/religion pairing and offering help to anyone and everyone who wanted to be helped or in this case saved.  

There are institutional and systemic roots to social problems such as crime, drug abuse, sexism, and homophobia. This educational model invites everyone who is affected by these systemic issues to seek help. I see this model work every day in my current ministry. I see people working their way toward health and healing and using Wesley’s model of Grace, salvation, hope, acceptance.

Yes, I see rejection as well, and the seeming inability to “do any better,” recidivism, continued abuse, and ongoing mental health issues. But I also see hope and change, and much benefit from being offered the Grace to be better if not well. My current context is the place where free will and prevenient Grace are certainly welcomed and accepted.

In multi-cultural settings a more universal and inclusive theology, such as that found in Wesleyan Grace is proven to be much more conducive to healing and recovery.


96 Thorsen, p. 8.
The methodology is also qualitative with regards to groups in treatment facilities and mental health clinics. Although groups there are voluntary as well, many of this group have "extra encouragement" from the Court System and/or their unnamed "others."

Many Post-modern scholars are looking at how a Wesleyan theology is bridging the gap in a therapeutic system and allowing spirituality to lead to transformation. Wesley’s understanding of Grace can and does lead to transformation.⁹⁷

All my training, education, and experience points to Grace as therapeutic and powerful in its ability to create transformation. Let me emphasize strongly that I and others are talking about transformation not universalism or Calvinism.

The influence of early Eastern “Fathers” over Wesley is seen in his emphasis on the therapeutic nature of Grace, rather than a more legal one. It is seen in Wesley’s belief that Grace is primarily for the inward healing of our nature as opposed to external pressure.⁹⁸ Our transformation into the image of Christ is the Eastern concept of ‘Theosis.’

Wesley was most fascinated by the Eastern father’s concept of “perfection as a process rather than a state.” Wesley’s devotional practices, practiced regularly by him led him to his own transformation and kept his faith alive.⁹⁹

I can use more fluid terms in my current setting, such as: Spiritual instead of religious, the term Grace fits very well in this context. Each member of the treatment group are like Wesleyan covenant groups in that they hold one another accountable, lift one another up, work

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⁹⁸ Outler, John Wesley, p. 9.

⁹⁹ Outler, John Wesley, p. 9.
for positive community growth, and are intentional about living a better life and helping one another live a better life. It is the Wesleyan model for small group societies. Participation in group/education at any level means that we use the “means of Grace” that Wesley set as a standard in his own devotional life and they are:

1) Particular rules or acts of holy living
2) Class and (Band) Meetings
3) Prayer meeting, covenant service, watch night services, love feasts
4) Visiting the sick
5) Doing all the good one can, doing no harm.
6) Reading devotional classics and edifying literature\(^{100}\)

In line with the educational model the “other” facilities -- prisons, hospitals, treatment facilities -- are the next step in covenant group growth. First, we educate the leaders, then we educate the laity and then we progress outward to “the other.” All are welcome and all accepted as they work toward their own transformation using the Wesleyan model of Grace.

Additional Materials for Grace Groups in Treatment Facilities

Sessions Overview:

Goals: To discuss the differences between religion and spirituality

To develop language to describe and discuss our spiritual experiences

Teaching Point: Finding one’s spiritual self (as Wesley would say having faith) is an essential aspect of becoming whole.

Topic Sequence and Recommended Timing

2 minutes   Quiet Time

10 minutes  Check-In

2 minutes   Goals

15 minutes  Discussion: Religion and Spirituality

10 minutes  Lecture: Spirituality, Religion and Addiction

25 minutes  Discussion: Spiritual Experiences

5 minutes   Close and Journal Assignment

Materials needed:

CD player and soft music

A Journal for each group member

An easel, table, flip chart, and felt-tipped markers or an overhead projector, transparencies, and transparency marking pens
1. Confidence-Speaking truthfully
2. Confession- Saying the true and difficult things
3. Conviction-Having a sense of wrongdoing or guilt
4. Conversion-Acceptance of an altered way of life
5. Continuance-Helping others as you have been helped

Forms of Spiritual Expression

Behaving-actions, rituals, lifecycles, holidays, charity, “doing good”

Belonging-community, culture, history

Believing-faith, meaning, theology

Being-experience of transcendence, life is a blessing

What is the Difference between Spirituality and Religion?

Spirituality
* Universal
* Awareness of relationship with all of creation
* Sense of purpose and meaning

Religion
* Particular
* Communal
* Material expression
* Rituals
* Provides: continuity, wisdom, moral/ethics
True or False?

Sometimes religious statements can be harmful to a suffering person and prevent the development of a relationship with God. Journal/discuss about the following statements below and see if they are helpful or harmful to you.

1) God doesn’t give you more than you can handle.

2) If I’m suffering, I must have done something to deserve it.

3) Forgiveness has its limits- You can’t be forgiven for something wrong you do over and over again.

4) Evil and pain are part of God’s plan for the world.

5) It’s not ok to pray for things I want.

6) If I really trusted God, I wouldn’t need medicine.

7) If I never prayed before, it’s wrong to start when things are going badly.

8) God is good all of the time.
A Vocabulary of Spiritual Life

What comes to mind when you read each of these words? Take a few minutes to write down your thoughts and associations with each word. Circle any words that seem important to you and that you would like to discuss more.

Faith
Awe
Meaning
Wholeness
Healing
Gratitude
Connection
Forgiveness
Compassion
Peace
Hope
Love
Purpose
Acceptance
Grace
Below is a partial list of practices that may help you cultivate spirituality in your life. Take a look at the list and see what speaks to you. Ask what nourishes your spirit? How would you incorporate these practices into your life? What would you add to the list?

Belong to and participate in a faith community
Take part in rituals, symbolic practices, and other forms of worship
Read sacred and inspirational literature
Practice forgiveness of yourself and others
Listen to or make music
Spend time in deep reflection, meditation, or prayer
Participate in groups that involve trust and cooperation (i.e. sports)
Observe the Sabbath-stop doing and enjoy being
Engage in dance or other types of physical expression
Involve yourself in acts of kindness to others
Spend time in nature
Appreciate the arts
Be creative-painting, knitting, cooking, gardening...
Share our spiritual journey with others
Keep a journal
Grace Quotes for Treatment Groups

Grace is God’s best idea. His decision to ravage a people by love, to rescue passionately, and to restore justly—what rivals it? Of all his wondrous works, Grace, in my estimation, is the magnum opus. (Max Lucado, *Grace: More Than We Deserve, Greater Than We Imagine*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014, p. xiii.)

Numerous examples have convinced me that God ultimately saves him whose motive is pure. (Ghandi, *The Essential Writings*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 244.)

If you fear you’ve written too many checks on God’s kindness account, drag regrets around like a broken bumper, huff and puff more than you delight and rest, and, most of all, if you wonder whether God can do something with the mess of your life, then Grace is what you need. (Max Lucado, *Grace: More Than We Deserve, Greater Than We Imagine*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014, p. 11.)

...find God’s goodness, Grace, and comforting presence in our pain. We see...God...at work in our trials and can bring gold out of our afflictions. (Vaneetha Rendall Risner quoted in a blurb in David Powlison, *God’s Grace in Your Suffering*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018. Unpaginated front material.)

Ultimately, Grace can never be earned. Like all gifts it can only be received, requiring that I simply open my hands and trust. (Mark Yaconelli, *The Gift of Hard Things: Finding Grace in Unexpected Places*, Downers Grove IL: IVP Books, 2016, p. 13.)
Praying the Lord’s Prayer

(Author unknown)

You cannot say the Lord’s Prayer and make one selfish plea,
You cannot say the Lord’s Prayer and even once say “me,”
For it’s our, our, our, and it’s us, us, us
And the fourth time it’s our, and the fourth time it’s us.

You cannot say the Lord’s Prayer and even once say “I,”
You cannot say the Lord’s Prayer and once say “my,”
You cannot pray the Lord’s Prayer and pray not for another,
For when you ask for daily bread, you must include thy brother.

For it’s us, us, us, and it’s our, our, our,
As free from selfish motive as the fragrance of a flower,
For others are included in each and every plea,
For from the beginning to the end it does not once say “me.”
Conclusions and Possibilities

The results of this “Oral History Project” and ongoing work have direct relevance and applications for the leaders in the Holston Annual Conference and the UMC in Central Appalachia and the United Methodist Church as a global church. It can help us as we develop and shape future church strategies. We have a significant opportunity to relate information and insights to the wider church.

We must share education and information ensuring an understanding of John Wesley’s interpretation and proliferation of Wesley’s concept of Grace. John Wesley worked hard to distinguish what he saw as essential Christian doctrine from matters of opinion. Wesley believed and affirmed the priority of God’s Grace working in every aspect of life for the salvation of God’s creation.

Wesley highlighted a concept of 1) the universal need for salvation 2) that salvation occurs by Grace through faith 3) That we could experience assurance and we could achieve 4) sanctification and true holiness.

John Wesley’s theology begins and ends with God’s Grace, always reaching out to unsaved persons, wherever they may be, throughout the whole of creation. Wesley believed that all could come to Christ. God leads us through the Holy Spirit and a variety of means of Grace to complete restoration. For Wesley, and for me, God’s Grace reveals a plan to restore all of creation into a fully loving and holy people and restores the destruction that occurred at the fall.

The twenty-first century United Methodist Church finds itself perched on a shaky parapet. We are hanging over the edge of yet another divisive age. The next General Conference -- whenever it is held -- will find us a fractured entity of the worldwide church that we hoped we would be, or falsely believed that we were.
Ultimately, it will be our diverse understandings of the very thing that makes us who we are that stands to separate us.

The four-legged stool of the Wesleyan (Methodist) Quadrilateral, scripture, reason, tradition, and experience are fueled by an understanding of Grace that is unique. The idea that all who find their hearts strangely warmed can take upwardly mobile steps to perfection is unique.\(^{102}\)

When clergy are ordained to the office of Elder in the United Methodist Church, we are asked “Historic Questions.” Two of those questions are related to the Wesleyan understanding of Grace:

1) Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?

2) Are you Earnestly striving for it?

For Wesley, entire sanctification is the trajectory of authentic discipleship, and presumably, the answer to both those questions is yes. In order to answer yes to those questions with integrity, one must share Wesley’s understanding of Grace. It is my experience and training that what we think, we will ultimately become.

In June 1999, I stood before the body of Holston Annual Conference and I answered yes to those historic questions. I am a graduate of Oberlin Divinity School, Vanderbilt University. Oberlin is one seminary still accepted as a place of learning for United Methodist clergy, although she is no longer a “United Methodist Seminary.” When the Methodist Church, during the Civil War, refused to provide the leadership of Grace and love, and instead became one of

\(^{102}\) Thorsen, p. 26.
the many homogeneous ecclesial enclaves, Vanderbilt pulled away from the then Methodist Church. However, she is still the burial place of four United Methodist Bishops before we were United Methodist. Like me, Oberlin has been teaching and chasing Grace since infancy.

It is possible, as illustrated in the Central Appalachian Church, that the larger church will be unable to heal the rift that is set within us. Many well educated, well meaning “Christian” persons disagree on what is ultimately an understanding of Grace. I cannot say what others, including voting delegates, will do but I do know that I will teach God’s Grace through a Wesleyan lens until my last breath. It is that Grace which heals all manner of ills and ultimately will make the path of reconciliation with God open to us all.

Holston Annual Conference, like the larger “church,” and the individual congregations are divided as to what path to take. The possibility exists that every congregation, every clergy member, every annual conference, every jurisdiction will be asked to decide which path we will choose, Calvin or Wesley. Perhaps both are equally good; certainly, our choice will determine our future or lack thereof as a missional church.

By splitting into self-justifying enclaves of like-minded congregations, the denomination I love may, like so many congregations, opt to mirror the brokenness of our current society and like the times of the 1800’s in this country we may once again merely model a broken region, a broken country, a broken church which breaks out in civil war.

We also possess the capability of mirroring the opposite and impacting healing from all manner of society’s ills. John Wesley in his sermon “On Schism” declares:

to separate ourselves from a body of living Christians, with whom we before united is a grievous breach of the law of love. It is nature of love to unite us together, and the greater the love, the stricter the Union...It is only when our love grows cold, that we can think of separating from our brethren. And this is certainly the case with any
who willingly separate from their Christian brethren...the pretenses for separation may be innumerable but want of love is always the real cause.”

We have a choice, we can choose total depravity, irresistible Grace and once saved always saved, or we can use prevenient Grace, sanctification, and love that heals and restores us to the presence of God.

Our entire human experience, and Wesley’s interpretation of Grace can help heal and strengthen our universal human experience, the United Methodist Church experience and the church as seen and experienced in the Central Appalachian context.

We truly live in a post-Christian era, but Grace, specifically a Wesleyan interpretation and understanding of Grace can help reunite our time with the ancient church and help renew what many believe we have lost. The world is our parish and a Wesleyan interpretation of Grace is how we reach that parish.

I have heard it said and I believe that we can be certain we are receiving the unconditional love of God when we make foolish mistakes, when we fail to do what other people want, but they don’t feel disappointed or irritated at us, and that love alone has the power to heal all wounds, bind people together, and create relationships beyond our capacity to imagine.

The healing, transforming power of God’s Grace presented through a Wesleyan lens can certainly help heal a fractured post-modern church in Central Appalachia.

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104 Thorsen, p. 141.
"May staying in love with God increasingly compel us through all means of Grace, so that we become a means of Grace to our neighbors and to all the world."
Appendix: Meditations for Use with the Educational Model

Session I

On Grace

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 1:1-7 (NRSV)

I had just submitted the first draft of my book on grace when I sat down to read my daily devotional and this scripture from Romans was the text. I had one of those moments when clarity strikes and you understand what is being done and being said in a whole new way. I mention that to explain what I see the Apostle Paul doing in Romans 1:1-7.

These verses are Paul's abstract; they are seven tightly packed verses, which summarize the letter to the Romans. Paul had never been to Rome as he writes this letter and unlike his other letters, he is introducing himself. He calls himself a "slave" and sets his call "toward the gospel of God."

The Letter to the Romans has a high priority in my work and in my life, especially in my work at the Holston Counseling Center. In fact, I cannot read the Letter to the Romans without tears flowing.

Romans is the book of Grace. It is the book of Love as defined by how much God loves us, you and me, all of us. The identity of Christ-believers is that they/we are slaves of
Christ and as such are defined by God’s love. We are all children of God. That is what Romans say: we are all brothers and sisters in Christ.

In my life I have often been defined by others by my differences. I was born in southwest Virginia, the second daughter of a public school bus driver and third generation tobacco farmer. I am the only one of five children born in Dante, Virginia, and one of the last children born in Clinch Field’s Coal Miners Hospital. I am told that a few days after my birth it burned to the ground never to be rebuilt.

I am the first college graduate in my family, and as a girl I was told that was not supposed to be possible. I am one of sixteen children in Russell County, Virginia who were chosen to take part in the first Head Start program in this country, thanks to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. I have loved always loved learning. I am a graduate of Oberlin Divinity School, Vanderbilt University, and thus I am one of a true minority group within Holston Conference. For years, I felt as if I were a second-class citizen of this Annual Conference because of the differences in my life.

In Romans the Apostle Paul has always reminded me that I am not second class at all. I am a “slave of Christ Jesus” formed by love and molded by Grace.

I define myself by what makes me the same: I am loved, I am blessed, I am graced. I am a child of God and Jesus is my model for living. So, to you, my brothers and sisters, I say whatever your differences are do not let your life be defined by them, and pay no attention to those who would call you second class. You and I are children of the King, and our Daddy calls us all “kids,” so that no one of us is greater or less, and all of us are born of love and molded by Grace. I pray we never lose sight of that.
Session II

Free Grace

_Praise in the Night: A Song of Ascents_
Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,
who stand by night in the house of the Lord!
Lift up your hands to the holy place,
and bless the Lord.3 May the Lord, maker of heaven and earth,
bless you from Zion. Psalm 134 (NRSV)

Surely, we are growing weary—and I am speaking specifically to my fellow clergy
here—of being locked away in our cells. It has been about a month since lock-down began
around the world. We have surely begun to realize that, though church buildings are no longer
essential, the Church is essential.

Psalm 134 is the last of the 15 psalms known as “Songs of Ascent.” A song of ascent is a
psalm that was sung beginning with a low vocal note ascending to a higher one, often moving
upward on a staircase built inside the temple to show a movement toward the heavens as the
song was raised in volume and tone.

The Psalms of Ascent remind me of the stages of Grace written about by Origen of
Alexandria and brought to us by our Methodist founder John Wesley. We move from prevenient
grace to perfection. Sometimes the “means of grace” are painful, but always liberating.

While we give praise from our cells, may we all realize more fully that the only
essential being is Almighty God. Wherever we are on the ladder toward perfection, may we
realize every day the presence of the one who was there before, and who walks with us today and
welcomes us all into loving arms.
Once we emerge from our cells we are going to see that things are not as they were; my faith tells me that that is the point. I have a long history with “restorative justice” in the prison system of the State of Tennessee, working with “the convicted.” The point of restorative justice is that restoration does not happen until the harm done by those seeking restoration is acknowledged. May the harm done by each of us be realized while we are in our cells! Then by the Grace of God may we keep moving upward. Brothers and sisters, bless the Lord right now!

Every morning I am awakened by the birds singing praise to God. It is the most beautiful and peaceful sound I have ever heard. It helps me remember (should I ever forget) that God the Maker of Heaven and Earth is blessing me and you from the holiest of places.

Wesleyan Covenant Prayer:

_I am no longer my own but yours,
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to suffering;
Let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, exalted for you, or brought low for you;
Let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing;
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it. And the Covenant now made on earth let it be ratified in heaven. Amen._
Session III

Justification by Faith

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever. Jeremiah 7:5-7 (NRSV)

Loving the Prophet Jeremiah is both a blessing and a curse. As the Rev. Dr. Renita Weems (my Hebrew Bible Professor at Vanderbilt University) used to say:

"context...context...context; content...content...content." Under that scope of exegesis Jeremiah is always on point. I think Dr. Weems is responsible for my always coming back to "the weeping prophet’s" prophetic voice.

In this section of scripture better known as "the temple sermon" I hear so much that strengthens my 1960’s baby spirit. I do want to shout it in the streets. So, y’all listen up: 1) False religion is worthless; 2) confidence in the temple is vain; and 3) never think that we can do wickedness without suffering for it.

The people, we people, have put our confidence in the temple and sacrifices that go along with that system. Fundamentally speaking if they/we are not to act justly with one another and worship God alone their/our trust has been misplaced, focused in the temple itself and its worship, rather than in the God of the temple and the divine expectations for the shape of our lives.

We messed up, y’all. We have mistaken the barn antenna (yes I’m dating myself) for the signal. We have mistaken the messenger for the message, the brick and mortar for the spirit, the
system for the church, ritual for righteousness. If God allowed the destruction of “Shiloh,” the “the place of peace” and Solomon’s temple, how long do we think God will tarry with us?

Shiloh housed the Ark of the Covenant for some 400 years, Jerusalem thought they were better than the Northern tribes because they had Solomon’s temple. What is our claim to survival? The Holston Conference? The United Methodist Church? If God did not spare them what makes us think that we will be saved from our own apostasy?

Scripture, reason, experience, and tradition show us 1) people become religious to get what they want; 2) people use religion to fake a relationship with God; 3) people use religion to compare themselves to others; and 4) religion disappoints.

Jeremiah shouts at us that religion should make a difference in our lives. By that I mean that the set of outward behaviors, practices, ethics, and rituals that we do or avoid doing to mark ourselves as believers should mean something. Believing in God means we ought to love and value what God loves and values. Righteousness over ritual!

So, may the Lord help us at my place of ministry, and yours, to practice a ritual of the righteous heart! May God and God alone increase that reality everywhere this message is heard. Let us repent and avoid the consequences of disobeying God’s command, and our promise, to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. Choose righteousness over ritual!
Session IV

On Perfection

*Today salvation has come to this house, because he too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.* Luke 19:9-10 (NRSV)

In the spring of 1992, when I was a lowly second year M.Div. student at Vanderbilt I met a professor who would help change my perception and practice of preaching forever. Michael Williams—pastor, preacher, writer and master storyteller—was my “Narrative Preaching” instructor, and someone I consider a mentor and model for all ministry. He made preaching come alive! Any freedom in preaching I might have I give all credit to the Reverend Dr. Michael Williams. His presence is missed in my life and in this world. I am thankful every day for his presence on my journey.

In the spring of 1992, a couple of other M.Div. students and I were in class with a plethora of Ph.D. preaching students. It was a little intimidating, but not for long. We as a class were instructed to pick a character from the gospel of Luke and build the character into a narrative sermon, which we would present to the class.

Now, Zacchaeus and I have/had been friends since bible school days back at Lake View Methodist Church (before it was “United”) in Castlewood, Virginia, and I knew for sure he was my character. I was stoked.

When my turn came to preach, I presented the character in 1st person: “I really just wanted to see Jesus, but they would not let me...so I ran as fast as my short legs would let me
and I sprinted up that Sycamore Tree...because I wanted to see Jesus and no one was going to stop me.”

When one of the Ph.D. students took issue with my characterization and my “psychologizing” Zacchaeus, Professor Williams shut him down like Jesus did the grumbling multitude. I was vindicated, I was accepted, I was loved; I was good enough to be at Vanderbilt, I was good enough to tell Zacchaeus’s story, and I was good enough to be in Jesus’s presence—just like Zacchaeus.

The Hebrew name Zacchaeus means “clean, pure.” Jesus saw him that way, regardless of how those around him saw Zacchaeus. And when Zacchaeus offered repentance for whatever shortcomings he might have had, Jesus proclaimed him just like his name: clean and pure.

Jesus declared that anyone, regardless of prior bad acts, who desires to see him will, like Zacchaeus, in return be seen by Jesus, and in this way their joy will be made complete.

Salvation, acceptance is for everyone born...

Thank you, Zacchaeus, for climbing that tree...

Thank you, Michael Williams, for helping teach me to see...

Thank you, Jesus, for seeing me

“Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” So does the song of Zacchaeus that I learned over 50 years ago in an old country church in Castlewood:

Zacchaeus was a wee little man
And a wee little man was he
He climbed up in a sycamore tree
For the Lord he wanted to see.
And when the Savior passed that way
He looked up in the tree
And said, "Zacchaeus, you come down!
For I'm going to your house today!
For I'm going to your house today!"

Zacchaeus was a wee little man
But a happy man was he
For he had seen the Lord that day
And a happy man was he;
And a very happy man was he.

Try singing this song in first person (put your name, gender, height and any other trait used for exclusion) in this song and find the joy that Jesus brought, that Jesus brings to your house. Sometimes the journey gets rough; sometimes we must fight to be seen and to see. Regardless, when we put forth the effort, Jesus sees us, and he loves us, and his presence in our journey brings joy, happiness, salvation, and grace.

Lord, accept my life as an offering. As I acknowledge what You have done for me so let me be the best I can for You. Help me to resist the current culture of the world and fix my attention on You. Thank you for all that You have given me through grace. Amen.
Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you. James 5:1-6 (NRSV)

Some of my earliest memories of growing up in Castlewood, Virginia, revolve around coal mines. My maternal grandfather (and some of his sons) were coal miners. Papaw was a miner when mining meant crawling through a two foot tunnel using a pick-axe to chip out coal.

I’m pretty sure I got my tolerance for dark caves and caverns from him. I also got at least part of my “fight the man” attitude from him. My papaw did not have the privilege of the United Mine Workers, and he worked himself to death for little or nothing to feed his family.

The scripture in James, I’m convinced, was written particularly for my grandfather and people like him. Spoiler alert: James’s chief concern is the well-being of the poor. He and my papaw Jason force me to ask myself: Does the way I live enhance or diminish the lives of poor people?

James writes of the primary sin of taking the wages of the laborers by fraud. Keeping people poor for the benefit of the wealthy is a sin. The rich and powerful often have means to subvert the system, and it is astonishingly easy to exercise unfair power without even recognizing it. Abuses of power include misclassifying employees as independent contractors, inaccurately registering workers in a lower skill code, paying women or minorities less for doing
the same job as others, and using children for jobs so dangerous that adults refuse to do them. Misuse of power can never be excused just because it is a so-called “standard practice.” A sin is a sin.

God chose the Roman Empire as the place where God would enter human life in the form of Jesus Christ. God is also choosing today’s workplace as a point of his presence. The primary work of the people (worship) is now and has always been outside the walls of the buildings we call churches.

Remember dear ones: 1) We can trust God to provide for us; and 2) we must work for the benefit of others, especially those in need and those crawling through dark places just to live.

Lord, I thank you for my work and the blessings it provides. May you watch over me this day and keep us safe from harm. Create in me a willing spirit and happy heart. Grant me the ambition to work hard and give me the strength to finish what I have started. May my hands always be prepared to help lighten another’s load. And finally, Lord, help remind me that the quality of my work is a reflection of you to those around me. Amen.
Session VI

The Educational Model in other Settings

Locusts, Fire, and a Plumb Line

_This is what the Lord God showed me: he was forming locusts at the time the latter growth began to sprout (it was the latter growth after the king’s mowings). When they had finished eating the grass of the land, I said,_

“O Lord God, forgive, I beg you!
How can Jacob stand?
He is so small!”
The LORD relented concerning this;
“It shall not be,” said the LORD.

_This is what the Lord God showed me: the Lord God was calling for a shower of fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land. Then I said,_

“O Lord God, cease, I beg you!
How can Jacob stand?
He is so small!”
The LORD relented concerning this;
“This also shall not be,” said the Lord God.

_This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD said to me, “Amos, what do you see?” And I said, “A plumb line.” Then the Lord said,_

“See, I am setting a plumb line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by;
the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.”

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, “Amos has conspired against you in the very center of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos has said,

‘Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile
away from his land.’”
And Amaziah said to Amos, “O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom.”

Then Amos answered Amaziah, “I am® no prophet, nor a prophet’s son; but I am© a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’

"Now therefore hear the word of the LORD.
You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel,
and do not preach against the house of Isaac.’
Therefore thus says the LORD:
‘Your wife shall become a prostitute in the city,
and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,
and your land shall be parcelled out by line;
you yourself shall die in an unclean land,
and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.’” Amos 7:7-17 NRSV

Whenever I read Amos, whatever the liturgical date or year, I feel as though he is speaking to me today! I pray that you hear that too.

Speaking truth to power is an amazing gift, an even though I have often been told “if you would just keep your mouth shut, everything would be so much better.” I agree to disagree, as does Amos. I have always chosen in my lifetime to model my behavior after people who refused to “keep their mouths shut”—people like Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., Amos, and Jesus. The prophetic voice calls us to “speak truth to power,” to remind the Emperor that he has no clothes on. We are to be as Amos in chapter 7, verses 7-15, who informed King Jeroboam that neither he nor his kingdom would stand against God. He just did not measure up.

There is divine anger welling up in the words brought through the prophet Amos. God’s justice breaks out as divine fury against injustice. If no one else will stand for “the victims of human cruelty,” the Lord will. Amos denounces any claim to authority with exception to that
given to him by God. Amos did not possess the “proper credentials,” but he did have the spirit of God inside him. Amos challenges me in these cautious times to not sit down, to not shut up, because I hear through the words of the prophet that a true word in the mouth of an honest person, whether credentialed or not, can bring down any power on earth; a true word can change the hearts of people. So, I will not sit down and shut up, I will not run back home and cry to my family. I will stand with the convict, I will stand with the addict, I will stand with the abused, I will stand with the sick, I will stand with the homeless, I will stand with the neglected, I will stand with the hungry, the disenfranchised the least, the lost, the lonely. As in Martin Luther’s great hymn, the prince of darkness grim does not reduce us to a puddle of anxiety, “for lo! his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him…that word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth.”

God will bring justice and I will stand with God. Stand with me! Even in these perilous times. Nothing stops the words, the righteousness, and the justice of Almighty God.
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