

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WATCHING OVER ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE: REAWAKENING A WESLEYAN
MODEL OF DISCIPLESHIP

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ABSTRACT

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Watching Over One Another in Love: Reawakening a Wesleyan Model of Discipleship

The Church of the Nazarene needs a new method for cultivating Christlike disciples. The church must re-tool to better equip people to engage a post-Christian America. Presently, American consumerism is swallowing up the formational influence of the church resulting in a kind of cultural religion that lacks transformational power. This dissertation proposes a way to counter-form the people of Kansas City Central Church of the Nazarene into believers who are being transformed into disciples through a renewed pursuit of holiness of heart and life. The research is grounded in John Wesley's understanding of the means of grace with particular attention given to the prudential means of grace. By traditioning these 18th century touchstones of Methodism, the church can build a creative Wesleyan-theological, practical, and enduring model for discipleship. The dissertation will culminate with the researcher developing a curriculum to facilitate these emphases.

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INTRODUCTION

Kansas City Central Church of the Nazarene in Lenexa, Kansas, is fairly representative of most medium to large evangelical congregations in North America. While the congregation offers a wide variety of programming, raises nearly two million dollars annually, and employs a dozen or so pastors in some capacity, it is generally failing to foster believers for whom holiness of heart and life remains a priority. In many cases, members of churches like Central can recite the books of the Bible and may even be fluent in Bible stories, but they fail to connect the dots between the lessons of Sunday School and the scriptural implications for the complex world in which they function. As a holiness denomination, Nazarenes draw historically from the theology of John Wesley, but the evidence of the holiness of Wesley's early Methodists appears largely missing. While Christians in these churches regularly employ historical and critical thinking in their non-church lives, they seem unable or unfamiliar employing this kind of in-depth analysis of their faith. Consequently, what they know historically, and perhaps even what they believe, fails to reframe their lives against the backdrop of mainstream culture. Churches like this suffer from what J.I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett describe as a case of being "...so close and yet so far away...like a shower of arrows that all hit the target but miss the bull's eye." As a result, many evangelical churches' discipleship could be described as a mile wide and an inch deep.

American consumerism threatens the formational influence of the church resulting in a kind of cultural religion that lacks transformational power. Dirk Ellis, while commenting on worship and liturgy, illuminates the problem of consumerism on

Nazarene churches.

Today the focus of contemporary liturgies is upon highly subjective and entertaining forms of worship that have the capacity to attract and retain the masses. However, the identity Nazarenes once found in the quest for the pious life and the pursuit of inward holiness intrinsic to the tradition of John Wesley, or its modified version as exemplified by the American holiness movement, has been largely lost to contemporary Nazarenes.

The church seems beset with what Wesley would call “dissipation,” or being so busy with life’s concerns that congregants have little capacity for attention to the things of the spiritual life. This general neglect of growth in the direction of transformation presents a larger concern when one finds this unique challenge not only at Central Church of the Nazarene but also in nearly all evangelical expressions of the church.

The concern surfaces for churches similar to Central Church in size and theology. For all of their efforts in ministry, the church continues to fail to transform Christians into the likeness of Christ for the sake of the world. While congregations like Central Church include well-meaning and sincere believers, they tend to leave spiritual growth up to church attendance and chance. What John Wesley referred to as holiness of heart and life remains the stated goal for congregations like Central, but the actualization of that goal is in question. This research purposes to discover a way to capture the imaginations of people who attend churches like Central Church and invite them into a refreshed expression of the vibrant life of following Christ.

In order to counter-form believers in churches like Kansas City Central Church of the Nazarene against the ubiquitous pull of American consumerism, it will be vital to return to both the theology and methodology of John Wesley. Nazarene’s must rediscover

Wesley's singular focus on holiness of heart and life *and* his practical application of the means of grace. In particular, a re-awakening to Wesley's most defining channel of God's grace, the prudential means, provides the pathway to discipleship renewal. Wesley's ability to maintain the authority of scripture while employing creativity and reason marks the way forward. Through John Wesley's prudential means of grace Nazarenes can find discipleship renewal and holiness of heart and life.

Succinctly, this dissertation contends that the pathway to tomorrow's evangelical church renewal goes through the yesterdays of John Wesley's Methodism. Wesley's emphasis on the means of grace frames this renewal, particularly the prudential means of grace which offers the possibility of holiness of heart and life through accountable discipleship.

Part One elucidates the problem of the American church. Using statistics from extensive polling done among American churches, the issue of consumerism will rise to the surface. This section also looks specifically at some Nazarene statistics as similar to those of the larger church in America. Additionally, this section organizes key aspects of Wesley's theology to support the thesis of this research as well as highlight significant contributors to the field of discipleship in the Wesleyan tradition. Part One culminates in highlighting Wesley's methodology for pursuing holiness of heart and life—the means of grace.

Part Two elevates the prudential means of grace as not only distinctively Wesleyan, but as the best path forward for the pursuit of holiness of heart and life. Additionally, the prudential means of grace opens the door to a creative and effective alternative to current discipleship trends in the church. Finally, Part two offers a

contemporary application of the prudential means of grace as a way to holiness in the form of a traditioned innovation of the Methodist class meeting followed by a summary of the chosen artifact and a discussion of the implications of this research.

PART ONE: The American Church Problem

The Participation Problem

While well documented in the last decade by such research groups as The Barna Group, a conversation with most any pastor or church leader will eventually result in a similar sentiment; the American church is struggling and many fear for its future. The cited causes for the struggle may vary but one thing everyone can agree on is that over the past 50 years, the levels of participation have trended downward and in the last decade, the drop in participation has been pronounced. The ACFI, now headed by George Barna, reveals that in 2016 barely one out of ten adults attended a Sunday School class or a small group. This decline in what has traditionally been known as the discipleship arm of American churches, resembles the decline in worship service attendance over the same period. Join this with the shriveling production of Christian books by Christian publishing houses and a general decline in Bible reading and one can see why Barna quips, “These certainly aren’t the good old days of religious instruction by any stretch of the imagination.” The statistics are hard to ignore: In the last 20 years church service attendance has declined by 21%. During that same period, small group participation has dropped by 28% and Sunday school participation has declined by 29%. The Pew Research Center recently reported that based on its research the number of people reporting no religious affiliation, the “*nones*” as they have come to be known, more than doubled between the years of 1990 and 2012, from 15% to 34%, leading James Emery White to conclude that, “America is not a Christian nation. This does not mean it is non-Christian or anti-Christian, simply that it has joined the ranks of many other Western

countries and is *post-Christian*.” The church, without question, has a participation problem.

The Nazarene Church has not avoided this decline in participation. Based on statistics provided by the USA Canada Regional Office of Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries (SDMI), discipleship attendance peaked in the mid-1970’s then began a downward trend that continues to this day. The only exception to this trend line occurred in 2009 but the reversal can be attributed to the inclusion of small groups in statistical reporting and even that was short-lived. Current SDMI attendance numbers are nearly identical to participation numbers from 1953.

Participation numbers may not provide a completely reliable indicator of the overall discipleship of American evangelicals. However, if declining participation in the historic discipleship settings of the church draws attention to the perceived *value* placed on discipleship, clearly something needs attention.

A Post-Modern Secular World View

Research from the The American Culture and Faith Institute (ACFI) agrees with the results of the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) that America is post-Christian and has moved into a post-modern and secular world view. What is most surprising about this reality is the rapid pace at which it has occurred. In 2005, two-thirds of American adults said that their religious faith was very important to them. Just *ten years* later that had slipped to only half. Clearly, orthodox Christianity is much less popular in America today than it was just one decade ago.

James White quotes a Barna Group survey in which respondents were asked to indicate their reaction to 15 measurements of their faith and participation in religious

activities.

To be deemed “post-Christian,” the person had to meet 60 percent or more of the fifteen factors. To be deemed “highly post-Christian,” the person had to meet at least 80 percent (twelve or more) of the factors. Examining these fifteen measures of non-religiosity, they found that 37 percent of Americans are generally post-Christian, and one in four (25 percent) are highly post-Christian.

It is tempting to write these findings off as pertaining largely to those outside the church, indeed the study was done to try and discover the origins of the “nones,” however, Barna points out that while on religious matters born-again Americans may participate at a higher rate, when measuring lifestyle behaviors “...the research consistently reveals little discernible difference in the core behaviors and lifestyle attitudes and values of born-again Christians when compared to other Americans.”

All of this seems to indicate that the cultural trends in America today are pervasive not only for the average American but also for those who identify as Christian and evangelical. Living in a post-Christian America makes the role of church leadership evermore challenging and undercuts the efforts of the church for the time and attention of participants in the church’s discipleship efforts.

These statistics appear not only alarming to church leaders, they are also sickening, according to Andrew Root. Quoting from Montreal philosopher Charles Taylor’s, “The Malaise of Modernity,” Root describes the “low-grade cultural stomachache” of pastors and church leaders today. While his analogy is a bit tongue-in-cheek, pastors report the sentiment of a nagging “illness” the source of which cannot be identified. Pastors are first-hand witnesses to the decline of church participation and have the battle scars to prove they have engaged the culture wars, but their training for ministry seems tooled for a time long forgotten. The malaise around how to minister in a post-

Christian world is tangible.

The Pull of Consumerism

To place a finer point on things, James Emery White quotes sociologist Peter Berger who has for many years insisted that the modern world is being shaped by three deep and fast-moving cultural currents: secularization, privatization, and pluralization. Secularization, White contends, means that the church is losing its influence as a shaper of life and thought in the wider social order, and Christianity is losing its place as the dominant worldview. Privatization means that a chasm is created between the public and private spheres of life, and spiritual things are increasingly placed within the private arena. Pluralization says that individuals are confronted with a staggering number of ideologies and faith options competing for their attention.

If White, and Peter Berger are correct, and the statistics from Barna and others seem to indicate that they are, then the powerful trends of post-Christian America have created a vacuum in the hearts and minds of people where faith and religious participation used to hold sway. Americans, and American evangelicals, are increasingly secularized, privatized, and pluralized. “The declining social significance of religion will inevitably cause a decline in the *number* of religious people and the *extent* to which those people are religious. When society no longer supports religious affirmation, the difficulty of maintaining individual faith increases dramatically.” It has been said that nature abhors a vacuum; so does ideology.

In the space created by post-Christendom, an alternative “religion” emerged, the religion of consumerism. “Consumerism is the idea that increasing consumption of goods and services purchased in the market is always a desirable goal and that a person's

wellbeing and happiness depends fundamentally on obtaining consumer goods and material possessions.” John De Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor, in their best-selling book, *Affluenza: How Overconsumption is Killing Us-and How to Fight Back*, see consumerism almost like a pathology. “A powerful virus has infected American society, threatening our wallets, our friendships, our families, our communities, and our environment. We call the virus affluenza.”

In our view, the affluenza epidemic is rooted in the obsessive, *almost religious* quest for economic expansion that has become the core principle of what is called the American dream. It’s rooted in the fact that our supreme measure of national progress is that quarterly ring of the cash register we call the gross domestic product. It’s rooted in the idea that every generation will be materially wealthier than its predecessor and that, somehow, each of us can pursue that single-minded end without damaging the countless other things we hold dear.

If one questions the qualification of consumerism as religion, look again at consumerism’s definition. Consumerism says that a person’s *wellbeing and happiness* depend upon the consumption of goods and services—a message clearly at odds with the scriptures. Note just these few examples:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

De Graaf and company agree describing the shopping center as the American place of worship. “The Mall of America is more than metaphorically a cathedral; some people get married there. It is a world-class affluenza hot zone.” Note this disturbing comparison:

Since World War II, Americans have been engaged in an unprecedented consumer spending binge. We now spend 71 percent of our \$15 trillion economy on consumer goods...in the Age of Affluenza (as we believe the century following World War II will eventually be called), shopping centers have supplanted

churches as a symbol of cultural values. In fact, 70 percent of us visit malls each week, more than attend houses of worship.

Jesus came to offer life abundant to be sure, but Americans appear to prefer the alternate religion of consumerism as their means to the abundant life.

Victor Lebow, in 1955, wrote what has become the touchstone for the consumerist mindset and the apparent template for the economic ideals of America. Consider his “religious” language and also consider that this philosophy has had decades to permeate the American culture aided by the powers of marketing and technology.

Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption *our way of life*, that we convert the buying and use of goods into *rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions*, our ego satisfactions, in consumption. The measure of social status, of social acceptance, of prestige, is now to be found in our consumptive patterns. *The very meaning and significance of our lives today expressed in consumptive terms*. The greater the pressures upon the individual to conform to safe and accepted social standards, the more does he tend to express his aspirations and his individuality in terms of what he wears, drives, eats- his home, his car, his pattern of food serving, his hobbies.

Consumerism serves as the religion of post-Christian America and it is deeply seated.

White, quoting Steve Bruce says, “To be sustained and kept intact, [a religion] must be cultivated and guarded. When widely shared and thoroughly embedded in everyday life, and in powerful social institutions, there is little danger it will disappear.”

Vincent Miller nuances this perspective on consumerism’s pervasive reach and durability by distinguishing between consumerism and consumer culture. Consumerism, in his view, includes the necessary action of obtaining goods and services in an economy burgeoning with overwhelming choices. The economy filled with these choices Miller calls a consumer culture. Miller traces the steady march of consumerism which transformed the world from a collection of invested craftsmen and craftswomen, to a

world made up of produced commodities. Every step of societal progress, in Miller's view, contributed to further removing the laborer from his/her labor. This detachment resulted in a commodification of culture where "commodities appear on the scene, as if descended from heaven cloaked in an aura of self-evident value, saying nothing about how, where, and by whom they were produced." The development of culture through industrialization and modernization only exacerbated this phenomenon until value was assigned to commodities based on what the consumer believed the commodity could provide them. Rather than deriving personal worth and meaning through creation, since the worker was divorced from the work, meaning was pursued through the acquisition of things.

Miller contends that this consumer culture is for all practical purposes here to stay. "As much as Christian communities may wish to define themselves over against the outside world, the line between the two is enormously difficult to draw." Further, his thesis insists that railing against the evils of consumption proves less effective than trying to better understand the impact that the ever-present consumer culture has on all things—including religious beliefs and practices. His work sheds light on the struggles that church leaders have today as they attempt to teach the timeless truths of God in an environment where beliefs from any variety of ideologies may be discovered, experimented with, and in the end, discarded. Add to this the temptation to "commoditize people" by well-intentioned religious leaders who live under the constant pressure of church growth and success. People risk being seen as commodities whose presence in increasing numbers can contribute to the successes of the leader.

The challenge is clear. The practice of consumers in a consumeristic culture

constitutes an alternate religion with extensive impact. James K.A. Smith retells the opening parable of David Foster Wallace’s Kenyon College commencement address:

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?”

Smith admonishes people to become aware of their immersions. Consumerism ingrained in a consumer culture is literally the water that Americans swim in and evangelical church leaders would do well to realize it.

The Johnson County Setting

Johnson County, Kansas, is comfortably middle-class suburban America. It is also the home of Central Church. It is a world where people live in nice homes, drive nice cars, and are well educated. Kansans in Johnson County have a median annual income of \$86,746, which is 40% more than the median annual income of \$61,937 across the entire United States. Only 5.3% of Johnson County falls below the poverty line. The average in the United States is 13.1%. The jobs generating this level of income are largely management, office and administrative, and sales related—classically “white collar” jobs. Ninety-five percent of Johnson County’s inhabitants have a high school degree or more with 55% of them holding bachelor’s degrees. Ninety-five percent of the homes have computers and 91% use broadband internet. The median property value is 1.2 times higher than the national average and 68% of its residents own their homes. When they leave home, Johnson County residents have an average of two cars from which to choose.

The cities sparkle with picturesque metro-parks and the boutique coffee shops are filled with upwardly mobile people using smartphones, laptops, and tablets and sipping

six-dollar coffee beverages. While the culture seems pleasant and passive, it possesses great power. Like most of America, this culture champions wealth, power, and status. It is not so far removed from the lyrics of the rock band Queen, “I want it all, and I want it now.” Pressure to fit in to cultural norms is subtle but strong and outsiders seem to stand out immediately, should they wander into this enclave of suburban middle America. While it may wear the garb of the middle class, this culture’s penchant for self-sufficiency traces its origin back to the Garden of Eden. Central Church seems common to other churches of its size in America, if not in actual setting, at least in aspiration. *Affluenza* offers a summary of America that fits Johnson County Kansans like a glove.

America’s 114 million households—the authors among them—contain and consume more stuff than all other households throughout history, put together. Behind closed doors, we churn through manufactured goods and piped-in entertainment as if life were a stuff-eating contest. Despite tangible indications of indigestions, we keep consuming, partly because we’re convinced it’s normal. Writes the columnist Ellen Goodman, “Normal is getting dressed in clothes that you buy for work, driving through traffic in a car that you are still paying for, in order to get to the job that you need so you can pay for the clothes, car, and the house that you leave empty all day in order to afford to live in it.”

All of this to say that while there are no placards reading, “First Church of Consumption,” or “Consumerism Assembly,” the grip of consumerism on the souls of Johnson County Kansans remains strong.

The implications of consumerism are important to the cause of discipleship. Nazarenes suffer from what T. Scott Daniels calls, “We Confusion.” Daniels contends that church folk identify more with their immediate culture than with the culture of Christ’s kingdom. George Barna summarizes the situation when he writes:

When all the smoke and mirrors are removed from the discussion most churchgoing people in America have no idea what the objectives of their religious pursuits are other than to be a better person, to believe in the existence and goodness of Jesus Christ, to keep God happy, and to be a good church member.

When pushed to describe in practical terms what these things mean and how they can best accomplish these objectives, alarmingly few people possess viable answers and almost nobody has a plan. They assume that attending church regularly, praying and reading the Bible occasionally, and completing a church program or two designed to facilitate spiritual maturity will do the job.

It appears that the history and implications of the gospel have fallen victim to the ubiquity of consumerism and the gospel has been undercut in its transformational influence.

The Pastoral Problem

Most alarming might be, however, Barna's insistence that church leaders seem satisfied with their level of discipleship emphasis. "Surveys among pastors revealed them to be quite pleased with the spiritual condition of their congregants and planning to continue on the same course of action to keep producing the same outcomes they have been generating." Perhaps pastors have learned to lower expectations to match outcomes rather than come face to face with the extent of the problem.

It appears that pastors and church leaders have been bitten by the bug of consumerism. Instead of finding ways to measure discipleship in the local church with the purpose of gauging its health and finding ways to improve, church leaders seem content to measure "...attendance, donations, program involvement, staff expansion, and space requirements. The assumption is that an increase in bodies, programs, dollars, employees, and square footage reflects a dynamic, healthy, growing ministry through which lives are being changed. Unfortunately, research within and across churches demonstrates that these assumptions are faulty: virtually no correlation exists between those factors and life transformation." Barna bemoans that following a massive research project designed to trace the spiritual development of Americans who identify as Christians, spiritual transformation is "shockingly rare." The church doesn't appear to

lack the necessary resources for life transformation, but it does appear to need a priority adjustment. Disciples are not likely to be formed in the consumer mindset of bigger, better, and more.

Once again, the Nazarene Church is not immune to this cultural phenomenon. The statistics on worship and discipleship provided by the Global Ministry Center of the Church of the Nazarene reveal that the discipleship arm of the local church, Sunday School, shows a steady increase in both participation and emphasis from the church's inception in 1908 until the mid-1970's. Circa 1977 two intriguing things happened: First, the church began to emphasize and track Sunday morning worship attendance. Second, Sunday School attendance shows a marked decrease in both emphasis and attendance. In fact, the Sunday School never recovered.

These statistics seem to indicate that once the church became interested in Sunday morning worship attendance, its emphasis on discipleship began to wane. Based on the pervasive nature of America's alternate religion, consumerism, and consumerism's emphasis on "bigger and better," it appears likely that the Nazarene's got swept up in a focus on church health as measured in buildings, worship attendance, and property while its historic emphasis on discipleship suffered. While lamentable, it is not surprising since 1977 marks the middle of the Church Growth Movement in the United States, itself an expression of church, one born of a consumerist mindset. "In the 1970s and 1980s, American evangelicals coupled their love for evangelism and missions with a new pragmatism steeped in marketing strategies. The result was a new emphasis on consumer-oriented church growth." What remains is a church now suffering decline in both worship and discipleship attendance. All of this seems similar to a farmer emphasizing barn

building and machinery acquisition but failing to cultivate a crop. The wrong emphasis is leading. More crops necessitate barns, not the other way around. The church needs to refocus on making disciples as the means to healthy and lasting church growth.

Looking Back for the Way Forward: A Review of Literature in the Wesleyan

Tradition

One of the casualties of a consumerist mindset occurs through the tendency to throw away what is deemed outdated or broken in order to move forward with something new. American consumers face the reality of planned obsolescence in their purchases. Businesses design products to wear out more quickly and require repairs so expensive that replacement becomes the better option.

Unfortunately, the tentacles of this mindset slipped into the church where leadership champion innovation, and the best of history all but forgotten. Creativity may be a good thing but failing to appreciate what has gone before serves as the church's recipe for compromise.

This section resists the temptation of consumerism by pointing to John Wesley and the early Methodists as reliable guides for the future of discipleship in the Church of the Nazarene. Like rowing a rowboat, this discussion has an orientation toward what is behind, but a straining toward what is ahead. This perspective frames the following discussion.

What is at stake in the Church of the Nazarene, and similar churches, is not merely the fate of the church in America, but more importantly the purposes of God in the world. When Jesus quoted Luke 61:1-2, in reference to himself in the synagogue in Nazareth, he was invoking the dramatic reversal of the forces of darkness that had been trumpeted in the Old Testament prophets. Jesus said:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

The significance of this moment is that Jesus declared he would not only lead this reversal but would himself embody it. Jesus was announcing the inbreaking of a new kingdom, one built not on power and wealth, but one built on sacrifice and love. Jesus began to teach his disciples to seek the fulfillment of this kingdom even as they prayed saying, 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'

Jesus' life and teachings clearly point to this kingdom's arrival and advancement, but Christians today look around to acknowledge that what was begun over 2,000 years ago is yet to be completed. Indeed, the preceding discussion of the church's relative ineffectiveness and the seeming relentless march of consumerism can be disheartening. It is at this point that the church's ineffectiveness at producing disciples comes to the fore.

The Biblical narrative declares that God has chosen to entrust the future of his kingdom into the hands of ordinary believers. What an overwhelming reality! Yet, many Christians today remain so steeped in the busyness of church activity that the realities of this mission escape their attention. For those who are aware of God's unfolding work, they struggle to imagine themselves adequate to the task of being a colleague with God. David Lowes Watson has authored numerous books and articles linking the call of Christ to make disciples with the work of Wesley and the Methodists. He writes:

If Christians are to understand their role, therefore, and undertake their task with integrity, they must not evade the mysteries of God's salvation; nor must they try to resolve them. Christians must rather seek to join with the risen Christ *in the midst* of the mysteries, proclaiming the hope of the gospel. They must work

faithfully in the world, waiting expectantly for God's redemption to be fulfilled, and wrestling with the tensions of a message which points to the future. To do all of this, they must be centered on Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit; and they must be formed into faithful, obedient disciples. Nothing less will suffice.

Discipleship, therefore, holds the answer to the problem. Without it, the church loses sight of the reason for which Jesus came and the world is deprived of the *good news*.

Such a cause is too important to be gobbled up by consumerism or any other force.

Jesus very clearly called disciples and handed that call over to the church in Matthew 28:19.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

While the church has had a mixed track record of faithfulness to both this call and commission, David Lowes Watson contends:

Yet there have always been those who have responded to the Jewish carpenter with integrity. Not only have their spiritual gifts been much in evidence, but their faithfulness and obedience to the teachings of Jesus have provided us with important role models for Christian discipleship... The early Methodist revival was such a time...

John Wesley's Methodists understood, after their founder, that the purposes of God in the world had been handed over to them and that in order to prove faithful, they would need a serious-minded pursuit of God. It is this focused approach that repeatedly drove Wesley back to the scriptures as the primary source testimony of God's intentions. Wesley frequently spoke of God's work in redemption as a recovery of God's original intentions for humanity. In the sermon, "A Further Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," Wesley sought, "...a restoration of the soul to its primitive health...the renewal of our souls after

the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.” While unimpressed with most reform efforts in church history prior to the Reformation, Wesley certainly didn’t develop his passion for primitive Christianity in a vacuum. Historic Christianity was mediated to him through reliable sources.

The Puritans, Pietists, and Moravians

Samuel Wesley, John’s father, had a penchant for technical theology and was a strong influence on both John and Charles. However, it was Suzanna Wesley, John’s mother, whose Puritan roots were taught to John and his siblings through her careful discipleship of the Wesley children. Suzanna’s father instilled in her the Puritan ideals intended to purify the Anglican Church and she, in turn, passed them on to the Wesley children. In fact, both Samuel and Suzanna possessed enough non-conformist tendencies that the Puritan ethos remained strong in them even though both pledged unity to the Anglican Church. While preaching, a Puritan point of emphasis, was Samuel’s role, Suzanna drilled into her children the Puritan sensibility that, “...God was so important that halfway measures were not possible: Christianity demanded the whole of personal and social life.” Suzanna’s course of discipleship included prayer, Bible study, catechizing, and detailed personal instruction in the Christian faith. Each evening she would take one or two of the children aside for an in-depth discussion of their spiritual development. These classic Puritan sensibilities were embodied in Suzanna and she firmly imprinted young John with the importance of whole-life surrender to the purposes of God. Suzanna’s influence took root. Wesley would later refer to the pastors and teachers of the Reformed churches “...as the proper successors of those who had delivered through all generations the faith once delivered to the saints.”

The German Pietists also represent a period of faithful pursuit of God and God's purposes on earth. Philip Jacob Spener saw the Lutheran church as passive and indifferent to the principles of Christ's kingdom. Spener advocated for self-examination, repentance, and conversion as a means to bring renewal to the church. Additionally, Spener created a program of church reform, the *collegia pietatis*, literally "schools of piety" in Latin. These semi-weekly group gatherings were designed to wed religious experience to practical piety by faithfully practicing prayer, Bible study, and an early expression of Sunday School. These efforts to educate and develop the laity gained momentum and formed the foundation of the German Pietist movement. This movement would be formational for John Wesley.

The German Pietist movement spread to other continents, but it was through a specific group of pietists known as the Moravians, that John Wesley discovered another expression of faithful Christlikeness. "The movement emphasized personal conversion with the expectation of a renewed life...(t)he Pietists insisted on congruence between one's profession and one's behavior; Christianity was a life to be lived, not just a mental faith." Banished from their home country and developing outposts in both England and the colonies, the Moravians practiced a simple lifestyle and a sincere faith. They fostered a courageous trust in God and believed strongly in a personal assurance of faith in Christ. For the Moravians, "...individuals were granted salvation by God instantaneously, i.e., 'born again,' and could be assured of this divine favor by the subjective experience they called 'the witness of the spirit.'" Indeed it was at a Moravian group meeting on Aldersgate Street in London that John Wesley experienced for himself the assurance of salvation he had first seen in the Moravians.

This serious-minded pursuit of Christlikeness has indeed found those who would take it up throughout history, none more significant than John Wesley and the Methodists.

John Wesley and the Early Methodists as a Way Forward

Church history reveals many faithful leaders, but few prove as faithful and effective in creating truly transformed disciples as John Wesley. What follows provides the rationale for looking back to John Wesley and the early Methodists as the way forward for the church today.

Wesley the Influencer

Wesley scholars are in broad agreement that 18th century Methodism represents a watershed not only in serious-minded discipleship and ecclesiastical renewal, but also in the preservation of the peace and people of England. John Wesley believed that the Church of England had abdicated its responsibility to uphold the cause of making Christlike disciples which resulted in a nation far from God. The England of his day was rife with social ills; unnecessary wars, the slave trade, uncharitable conversation, alcoholism, and lifestyles that did not reflect the love of God and neighbor. Further, the citizens of Wesley's England had become preoccupied with the accumulation of riches coupled with a lack of generosity to the poor. Wesley loved the Church of England that birthed him but saw its relative disinterest in pursuing holiness of heart and life. Who could have predicted that within his lifetime, John Wesley's influence would play a part in the crumbling class system and reform of many of the nation's social ills? Further, that this re-ordering would not come with the bloodshed of the French Revolution, but would rather be quiet, orderly, and grounded in spiritual renewal led by Anglican revivalists and their lay assistants. Through John Wesley and the Methodists, the nation was shaken to its

core but not by the footfalls of marching troops, rather by the power of an awakening. “Early in the nineteenth century, historians began to weigh the effect Methodism had on the course of England’s destiny. Wesley was acknowledged to be the guiding spirit of the age, much as Voltaire had been during the same period in France.” While scholars continue to debate this specific claim, there is general agreement that the “...transformation of English society was largely due to the impact of Wesley and the movement he spawned.” The seed of the gospel grew into national reform through the influence of Wesley and the Methodists.

While the situations of 18th century England and 21st century America seem vastly different, at least one thing appears to connect them. Both situations reveal a church with lackluster discipleship impact. What the early Methodists were able to do in their situation provides a helpful study for Nazarene’s and other evangelical churches in this century.

Wesley the Evangelist

The core of this renewal was grounded in the spiritual awakening of those who remained “asleep” in their apathy toward God. John Wesley believed that while humans were created in the image of God, sin entered into human existence through the fall of Adam and Eve resulting in a nature that was turned inward toward self. While the resultant condition may or may not look like the depths of sin, every person was utterly unable to bring about her/his own salvation. Through prevenient grace God works to awaken a person to the offer of salvation and a new beginning.

To this end, Wesley, especially in the earliest days of the Methodist revival, preached strong sermons designed to challenge his hearers to come to grips with their

spiritual slumber. He was convinced that most people were not sufficiently conscious of their need for awakening. Through a variety of means, they had resisted the overtures of God's prevenient grace and any potential change would require awakening to this need as, "none will come to the Physician but that are sick and are thoroughly sensible to it." In addition to strong preaching, Wesley also believed that tragedies, natural disasters, conversations, and direct conviction by the Holy Spirit were also means to awakening. Regardless of the means, however, there could be no salvation without first an awakening. In *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, Wesley writes to the Reverend Mr. Perronet of the response to his preaching:

Many of those who heard this began to cry out that we brought "strange things to their ears;" that this was doctrine which they never heard before, or at least never regarded. They "searched the scriptures, whether these things were so," and acknowledged "the truth as it is in Jesus." Their hearts also were influenced as well as their understandings, and they determined to follow "Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Preaching for awakenings in the spirit of Wesley has fallen out of vogue in post-modern America. Pastors and churches have fallen victim to what Juan Luis Segundo has called "The General Rule of Pastoral Prudence." Segundo defines this as "seeking to retain the maximum number of members by requiring the minimum in obligations." Perhaps awakenings may be initiated in creative ways beyond fiery preaching alone, but the awareness of the need for God has not changed from Wesley's century to now.

Wesley the Disciple-Maker

While Wesley advocated for the awakening of those who showed apathy toward the things of God, the awakening was, to speak metaphorically, the starting line and not the finish line. John Wesley understood that the nature of humanity would require more

than simply grief over the sin condition or a “moment’ of salvation. Sin was deeply ingrained in the human condition and the process of overcoming it would require growth in grace.

(T)here is nothing more certain than that the Holy Spirit will not purify our nature, unless we carefully attend to his motions, which are lost upon us while, in the Prophet's language, we “scatter away our time,”—while we squander away our thoughts upon unnecessary things, and leave our spiritual improvement, the one thing needful, quite unthought of and neglected.

Wesley was convinced that the grace of God must meet with human cooperation for growth to occur.

To this end Wesley drew from his early homelife under the careful tutelage of his mother, the education he received both as student and tutor, and his leadership of the famed “Oxford Holy Club,” to gather together those who experienced an “awakening” through his preaching into smaller groups. This group concept would mature over time, but each development had in common a kind of accountable discipleship that enabled the participants to spur one another on toward holiness of heart and life. Again, in correspondence with Rev. Perronet:

Thus arose, without any previous design on either side, what was afterwards called *A Society*... They wanted to “flee the wrath to come,” and to assist each other in so doing. They therefore united themselves “in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they might help each other to work out their salvation.”

The combination of John Wesley's zeal for the souls of his countrymen and his remarkable ability to create relational connections through “watching over one another in love,” made early Methodism the most important discipleship movement since the Acts church and foundational to the renewal of the church today.

Clearly churches in post-modern America have seen the benefit of connecting

believers in relational settings. Unfortunately, these connections do not go quite far enough in engendering lasting spiritual impact on the participants. Too often the groups are centered only around the affinities of the members or provide only a relational connection with little expectation for real transformation. Wesley and the Methodists modeled a different approach; one that has much to teach American church leaders.

Nazarene Roots in Wesley

A final reason to look back at Wesley's Methodists as a way forward today is that the Church of the Nazarene claims Wesley and Methodism in its heritage. The Historical Statement in the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene reads:

Our Christian heritage was mediated through the 16th-century English Reformation and 18th-century Wesleyan revival. Through the preaching of John and Charles Wesley, people throughout England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales turned from sin and were empowered for Christian service. This revival was characterized by lay preaching, testimony, discipline, and circles of earnest disciples known as "societies," "classes," and "bands." The Wesleyan revival's theological landmarks were: justification by grace through faith; sanctification, or Christian perfection, likewise by grace through faith; and the witness of the Spirit to the assurance of grace. John Wesley's distinctive contributions included an emphasis on entire sanctification as God's gracious provision for the Christian life.

The ongoing debate between those within the Church of the Nazarene who identify more with the American Holiness Movement of the 19th century and those who identify more with the Wesleyan Revival of 18th century England continues with plenty of energy on both sides. While the American Holiness advocates tend to emphasize the pulpit and the altar, those advocating for a stronger link to the Wesleyan Revival point to the importance of the liturgy and the sacraments. The relative merits of each argument notwithstanding, many warm-hearted Nazarenes argue for an approach that, out of love for one another, makes room in Nazarene churches for the best of both movements. This is an admirable and indeed holiness mindset, however, this discussion; and many other inter-denominational squabbles, draws the church's attention away from a much larger point. The Church of the Nazarene's stated mission is, "To Make Christlike Disciples in the Nations." Based on the statistics offered in the first section of this paper that show the

Nazarenes' waning discipleship impact in the United States and Canada, it seems that the church should lay aside debates like this and return to its stated mission to make Christlike disciples in the nations. Those, like Wesley and the Methodists, who have done so throughout history shine as bright lights of faithfulness to the scriptural call of the Lord Jesus.

Key Aspects of Wesley and Methodism that Frame Discipleship Renewal

The following subjects not only stand out and, in many ways, define Wesley's Methodists, they are also central to the development of the thesis of this research. In addition to sketching out the concepts and their importance for this project, a few of the key voices in Wesleyan scholarship will be noted for their contributions to the field.

Holiness of Heart and Life

In the *Minutes of Several Conversations*, John Wesley offers the most succinct statement of purpose for the Methodists. The question is framed to determine God's prerogative in raising up the movement.

Q.3. What may we reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists?

A. Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.

There is wide agreement that Wesley never wavered in his singular passion for the goal of scriptural holiness and nearly any Wesley scholar can detail the various attempts to derail Wesley from this aim. Whether the controversies be from his critics or his converts, Wesley maintained a "radical concern for true religion over against a nominal Christianity."

By *salvation* [the Methodist] means *holiness of heart and life*...a Methodist is one who has "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given to 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.”...[and] this commandment is written in his heart, that “he who loveth God, loves his brother also.” ...His obedience is in proportion to his love, the source from whence it flows. And therefore, loving God with all his heart, he serves him with all his strength...

This quote, and Wesley's other references to the subject, has led scholars to describe Wesley's highest ideal for the Christian to be “holiness of heart and life.” Kevin Watson illustrates when he describes that Wesley's understanding of sanctification was the primary doctrine which connected beliefs to actions, thus holiness of *both* heart and life. He says that Wesley understood entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, to be the particular doctrinal distinctive of Methodism. From John Wesley's own pen, then:

From this short sketch of Methodism (so called) any man of understanding may easily discern that it is only plain scriptural religion, guarded by a few prudential regulations. The essence of it is *holiness of heart and life*; the circumstantial all point to this.

Indeed, the unwavering focus of Wesley was the focus of the Methodists; holiness of heart and life was their point. Clearly for John Wesley, true religion resulted in a transformation of both the heart and the actions of the believer.

As detailed above, the Nazarene Church traces its heritage to John Wesley and the Methodists but finds itself struggling to create an environment where people are taking seriously Jesus' call to discipleship. If one understands the call to discipleship to be, both in the scriptures and presently, the call to follow Jesus and take on his very nature, Wesley's dogged insistence on holiness of heart and life makes perfect sense. Holiness of heart and life is the highest aim of discipleship, as this project will demonstrate.

Responsible Grace

Randy Maddox's important book, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical*

Theology, has become essential reading to any Wesley study. While offering a well-rounded and in-depth look at Wesley's understanding of grace, it has also become a useful shorthand for Wesley's discipleship theology in a nutshell. Maddox explains that Wesley believed “without God’s grace, we *cannot* be saved; while without our (grace-empowered, but uncoerced) participation, God’s grace *will not* save.” Maddox contends that Wesley's view of Christianity held these two essential truths in vital tension.

Maddox refers to this in another phrase that has become common language in Wesley studies. He calls this Wesley's “orienting concern.”

I want to make clear that it is not simply one theological concept or metaphor among others. It is a perspective within which one construes (or a “worry” which one brings to) all of the various types of theological concepts. Second, in keeping with its meta-conceptual nature, an orienting concern is not an architectonic idea from which all other theological affirmations would be deduced, or under which they must be subsumed. Its role is not to be the fountain from which doctrines spring or the pattern into which they must fit, but the abiding interest which influences the selection, interpretation, relative emphasis, and interweaving of theological affirmations and practices. Third, an orienting concern is often implicit, having been imbibed with one’s theological nurture. It functions in theological reflection as a way of thinking that seems so natural and inevitable that it is seldom directly scrutinized. Instead, it is the light in which all else is scrutinized. Fourth, one need not have a comprehensive summary of the claims consistent with a particular orienting concern prior to engaging in theological reflection. In fact, it is precisely the search for consistent expressions in relation to new issues that enlivens a theological tradition. Fifth, it is probably possible to operate with more than one orienting concern. However, if Peter Slater is correct that religious traditions seek related clusters of primary symbols and that it is typically a central symbol which provides this relation, then the relative primacy of one orienting concern within an individual’s practical-theological activity is likely. And finally, given Christianity’s salvific emphasis, Christian orienting concerns will characteristically focus on the general issue of how God interacts with humanity.

Though perhaps an oversimplification, responsible grace represents the lenses through which John Wesley viewed the world. When Wesley considered the ultimate purposes of

humanity, he saw those purposes enabled by the grace of God. Similarly, when Wesley considered the purposes of God, those purposes always involved God offering grace to humanity.

Henry Knight picks up this thread as well, describing Wesley's image of “true religion.”

First, the Christian life is most fundamentally lived as a response to God's love for us...Second, our love for God and our neighbor are core affections...which govern the Christian life...Third, these affections are relational, in that they constitute relationships with God and our neighbors...Fourth, Wesley equates this love, along with its attendant affections, with holiness.

Knight's four fundamental expressions of Wesley's Christian perspective in many ways mirror Maddox.

To retrace the argument briefly: Wesley understood the goal of Christianity to be holiness. This holiness would not only be evidenced in the cleansing of the heart but would be expressed in the actions of the believer, namely love of God and neighbor. This was only possible in response to the gracious outpouring of God's grace upon humans. Through this framework, Wesley lived and ministered.

The preceding discussion highlighted the impact of the early Methodist movement on 18th century England and presented the followers of John Wesley as a key embodiment of the cause of Christ. It also pointed to John Wesley's understanding of grace as the work of God to enable the goal of the Christian experience—holiness of heart and life. It is important to return to Maddox's understanding of “responsible grace” as it balances the meritorious work of God with the human response to that work. To restate, ““without God's grace, we *cannot* be saved; while without our (grace-empowered, but uncoerced) participation, God's grace *will not* save.” Here is the theological foundation from which

the church today may benefit from a look back at Wesley as it looks toward a more effective disciple-making future.

Many Nazarenes welcome current renewal efforts restoring right theology, but in its historical emphasis on holiness doctrine, the church risks overlooking Wesley's best contribution to church history which is his method. What is needed for renewal within the Church of the Nazarene then is born not from more emphasis on *orthodoxy*, but rather a return to John Wesley's distinctive *orthopraxy*. The significance of this need is seen in the discussion of the Methodist's most defining feature, the means of grace. The next section will present the means of grace as the "responsible grace" pathway to holiness of heart and life.

Wesley's Path to Holiness of Heart and Life

The Means of Grace a Thesis for Renewal

While an ocean and nearly 300 years separate John Wesley's ministry and Kansas City Central Church of the Nazarene, the two share a passion for true religion over against nominal Christianity. In order to counter-form believers in churches like Kansas City Central against the relentless pull of American consumerism, it is vital to return to both the theology and methodology of John Wesley. Nazarene's must rediscover Wesley's singular focus on holiness of heart and life *and* his practical application of the means of grace. In particular, a re-awakening to Wesley's most defining channel of God's grace, the prudential means, provides the pathway to discipleship renewal and holiness of

heart and life for the Nazarenes.

The pages that follow offer a reminder of Wesley's understanding and application of the means of grace, and the proposal of a traditioned Wesleyan curriculum as both a practical response to the dangers of the consumeristic mindset of post-modern Nazarenes and as a prudential means to holiness of heart and life through accountable discipleship.

What John Wesley referred to as holiness of heart and life is indeed the goal for congregations like Central. It is crucial for the church to continue the search for a way to capture the imaginations of people and invite them into the vibrant life of following Christ. In Wesley's own words:

Men are generally lost in the hurry of life, in the business or pleasures of it, and seem to think that their regeneration, their new nature, will spring and grow up within them, with as little care and thought of their own as their bodies were conceived and have attained their full strength and stature; whereas, there is nothing more certain than that the Holy Spirit will not purify our nature, unless we carefully attend to his motions, which are lost upon us while, in the Prophet's language, we "scatter away our time,"—while we squander away our thoughts upon unnecessary things, and leave our spiritual improvement, the one thing needful, quite unthought of and neglected.

The church seems beset with what Wesley would call "dissipation," or being so busy with life's concerns that congregants have little capacity for attention to the things of the spiritual life. A larger concern is that this general neglect of growth in the direction of transformation is not unique to Central Church of the Nazarene but is rather the case in nearly all evangelical expressions of the church.

The Origins of the Means of Grace for John Wesley

The phrase, "means of grace," is not unique to John Wesley. Dean G. Blevins traces the origins of both the term and Wesley's adaptations of it pointing to its Puritan

roots, its use in the Book of Common Prayer, and Wesley's early treatment of it in his 1746 sermon, *The Means of Grace*. Though he inherited the concept he synthesized its definition in the midst of theological controversy. It was not in the sterile environment of the academy where these concepts were worked out, rather, Wesley's parish work inspired the means of grace. Maddox, Knight, Blevins, and others make reference to Wesley as a kind of "pastoral theologian" before he was a systematist. In his own words, Wesley defines the means of grace:

By "means of grace" I understand outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.

It is in this light that Wesley takes a major tenet of the Church of England and adapts it for the pursuit of holiness in the hearts and lives of those he shepherds.

Wesley scholars have long nuanced Wesley's definitions for preventing, justifying, and sanctifying grace. Rather than rehash those arguments here, it is fitting to simply indicate that the means of grace were, as Wesley said, the ways that God works in the hearts and lives of people, through quite accessible channels, to bring about holiness. Importantly, however, believers must be active participants in that grace. One's responses to God's initiatives of grace can be described as "graced practices," which connotes the repetitive, therapeutic nature of the means of grace in producing transformation in the believer. These graced practices take hold when in a kind of divine/human interplay, believers respond to the outpoured grace of God.

It also seems clear that the particular means of grace that Wesley champions are those things by which he had been formed. As stated earlier, John Wesley was a product

of the Church of England; the son of devout parents; and a student of theology. As a result, his history created in Wesley both a desire for holiness and the raw materials to inspire the pursuit of holiness.

The Framework of the Means of Grace

Wesley understood the means of grace to be scriptural. In his message by the same title, he references scripture repeatedly, quoting the gospels, the writings of Paul and the book of James. He declares that not only did the apostles avail themselves of the means of grace, but so did our Lord. It is upon this foundation in scripture that Wesley builds his understanding and application of the means of grace.

Additionally, he understood the means of grace to be relational. By this Wesley intended to speak of the relationship between God and humanity. Grace is not something that deals only with the past in a juridical sense, but rather grace is up to date, so to speak. God desires that his creation lives in relationship with God in the present. “God’s grace is conveyed to humanity and humanity in relationship responds to God. Overall, the means of grace are really God’s gifts to us. They are the ways we connect with God and participate in our relationship with him. As we open ourselves to God, God pours his own life and the grace we need into our hearts. When that happens, we will change; we will be spiritually formed and transformed.” It makes sense, then, that the means of grace are the practices that facilitate this life-changing relationship.

Wesley understood the means of grace to be essential. He was clear that the sole aim of the means was holiness of heart and life and without the solitary work of God this was impossible. Whether it be awakening a sinner to the need for faith or forming the believer into the likeness of Christ, the means of grace were the channels through which

God's grace and human response flowed. Without the means of grace, then, Wesley understood people to be staring helplessly across the chasm between God and humanity. It was the means of grace that opened up a life-giving connection.

The Various Means of Grace in Wesley

While Wesley never created a definitive list of the means of grace, scholars have poured over his sermons, journal entries, letters, and meeting minutes to create a fluid list. Henry H. Knight's grouping seems to be the clearest approach. Knight lists three major categories for Wesley's means of grace.

The General Means

The first set identified by Knight is the General Means of Grace. While this category isn't mentioned in Wesley's sermon on the means of grace, it is first referenced in his Meeting in Conference in 1745. Andrew Thompson believes that without the general means of grace, the discussion of the efficacy of any other means of grace is pointless. In the meeting minutes of the conference Wesley records:

Q. 11. How should we wait for the fulfilling of this promise [of entire sanctification]?

A. In universal obedience; in keeping all the commandments; in denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily. These are the general means which God hath ordained for our receiving his sanctifying grace.

For Thompson, the general means of grace are less practices and more an awareness of "...one's motivations in thought, word, and action...that collectively constitute a kind of faithful disposition toward all that one does in pursuit of sanctification." Later, in the Larger Minutes of 1780, 1789, Wesley gives the fullest expression of the means of grace, detailing again these "general" means without titling them as such. Wesley goes on to say clearly that while the other means of grace may be used without fruit, the general means of grace cannot. They are integral to the pursuit of holiness. Like the soil is to the flower, the general means are the disposition out of which

the other means flourish.

The Instituted Means

The next category Knight lists are the Instituted Means of Grace. Wesley specifically mentions three instituted means in his sermon on the means of grace. These are prayer, searching the scriptures, and the Lord's supper. However, in his later works he adds fasting and Christian conferencing. Knight contends that Wesley understood these to be appointed by God and universal to the church in all eras and cultures—thus, instituted. While it seems clear that these are the practices of a believer, Wesley spends considerable time in his sermon illustrating how these same means might lead one to conversion. In the Instituted Means, Wesley believed that God had specifically ordained these practices to be conduits of grace.

With regard to prayer, Blevins fleshes out the methods and characteristics of prayer Wesley admonished. Wesley believed that all prayer should come from the heart in sincerity. Perhaps this accounts for his expansion of a rigid formal prayer life to one punctuated by extemporaneous and even short “ejaculatory” or exclamation prayers. Wesley believed that prayers should be characterized by petition, confession, intercession, and thanksgiving and often used written prayers as a guide. His love for the Book of Common Prayer did not preclude his revision of it on several occasions. A summary statement would be that Wesley was both formal and informal in the manner of praying-- using both extemporaneous and traditional prayers of the church-- but he was resolute in his insistence on the importance of prayer. For Wesley, prayer must be communication from the heart of God to the heart of the believer and vice versa.

Searching the scriptures was essential to the life of the believer as Wesley

modeled. The scriptures provided the foundation for his life and ministry and also constituted the channel through which God could pour his sanctifying grace. As a Christian leader, Wesley was at the same time well-read and also *homo unis libri*, marshalling the intelligence and education God had given him in the priority he gave to the scriptures.

The Lord's Supper has been called the chief among Wesley's means of grace. Wesley believed that since Jesus had specifically instructed his followers to receive the Lord's Supper, that it was incumbent upon the believer to comply. Wesley was known to receive the Lord's Supper at least weekly and admonished his Methodists to receive communion as often as possible. It was for him the food for the soul as a memorial to Christ's atoning work, the real presence of Christ in the act of communing, and a promise of the coming glory.

Wesley believed in and practiced fasting as a means of grace. He believed that abstinence from food was a worthwhile practice as it opened up more time for prayer and also defeated the grip of temporal things over us reminding us of our dependence upon God.

His views on Christian conferencing are insightful as well. For Wesley, conferencing might include gatherings for fellowship and instruction as we might more traditionally define a conference. But Wesley also viewed rightly ordered conversations which offer channels of God's grace to believers as a means of grace. Not only is this perspective on the value of Christian discourse well-rounded, it speaks across the years and is, like its counterparts, applicable today.

The Prudential Means

Few would argue that what Wesley termed the “instituted” means of grace; prayer, searching the scriptures, the Lord’s Supper, fasting, and Christian conferencing were in fact scriptural and obvious ways in which God pours out grace. Where Wesley’s uniqueness is demonstrated is in his concept of what he termed the “prudential” means of grace. In the Larger Minutes of 1778, Wesley introduced the concept of the Prudential Means of Grace. Henry H. Knight identifies the prudential means of grace as:

1. Particular rules or acts of holy living
2. Class and band meetings
3. Prayer meetings, covenant services, watch night services, love feasts.
4. Visiting the sick.
5. Doing all the good one can, doing no harm.
6. Reading devotional classics and all edifying literature.

While Knight identifies these hallmarks of early Methodism as prudential, he also allows that in the spirit of the prudential understanding of the means of grace, other things may prove graced by God. The underlying argument of this dissertation is that it was specifically the prudential means of grace that set Methodism apart and were the practical reasons for its rapid growth and effectiveness in fostering holiness. Further, it will be in the spirit of the prudential means of grace that Nazarene’s find a foundation for discipleship renewal in the days to come.

The Origins of the Prudential Means

While true that the concept of the means of grace predated Wesley, it is important to trace, in as much as is possible, the origins of the prudential means as Wesley understood them. For this, one must look to the words and actions of Wesley himself, but also to the environments in which Wesley lived and ministered.

It has been established that Wesley's home life and education were significant factors in his development of the prudential means of grace. While his father may have favored classical theology, his mother was left with the task of raising children who would know and serve God. No doubt Suzanna's Puritan heritage steeped her in prudence and before her children could articulate it, Suzanna Wesley was modeling the prudential means of grace in her interactions with them. She wanted to see her children love and serve God and was motivated to find the means to this end. It is enlightening to read snippets of her correspondence with her children as they left home for their education. Clearly, she expected them to continue in her methods and for the most part they appear to have consented. Her strict routines, her weekly meetings with each child, and her insistence on the primacy of scripture and prayer, all done within the context of 18th century English homelife, were expressions of what Wesley would later practice as prudential means of grace.

Additionally, John Wesley was influenced by the education he received in the spirit of the day in which he lived. Wesley was well read in John Locke's philosophy and empiricism. It was inevitable that the popular trends in learning would influence the development of his ministry. "That Wesley tried to accommodate his theology to the 'experimental' philosophies of his day seems to be well established." It has also been widely demonstrated that Wesley was indebted to Christian Platonism. John C. English contends that John Norris, a Malebranchean Platonist, wrote at least two works that were essential to Wesley. Norris' *Treatise Upon Christian Prudence* and *Reflections Upon the Conduct of Human Life* were both in the Christian Library Wesley prepared for his itinerant preachers. These were among the works Wesley kept in print for the remainder

of his life indicating his high regard for them. Wesley even wrote extracts from these two works and published them for the benefit of students at Oxford.

Norris' *Treatise Upon Christian Prudence* may have influenced the conceptions and vocabulary of Wesley's prudential means of grace. Norris referred to prudence as a means. He seems to be using "means" as a way to talk about a pathway to *happiness*. While Wesley will redirect the means to point toward *sanctification*, it seems that the concept of certain things functioning as means to a desired end was prominent in Norris. Norris also referred to prudence as a virtue, but a virtue of the second order. The instituted means for Wesley implied "instituted of God" and therefore of primary importance; the prudential means were vitally important but were not scripturally mandated in his thinking. There appears here a connection to Norris' ordering of virtue. Though far from direct proof, one cannot help but conjecture that Wesley's sense of the prudential means of grace which he believed functioned in tandem with the instituted means of grace, may have found further development in the influence of John Norris.

Wesley's Interpretation of the Prudential Means

It follows, then, that these influences would become apparent in the ministry of John Wesley. In his *Thoughts Upon Methodism*, Wesley wrote, "From this short sketch of Methodism (so called) any man of understanding may easily discern that it is only plain scriptural religion, guarded by a few prudential regulations. The essence of it is holiness of heart and life; the circumstantial all point to this." Not to make too much of a relatively short quote, but here it is evident that Wesley's orienting concern of holiness and his coupling that with prudential means mediated through reason provide an early indication of where his thinking was.

Kenneth Collins picks up this theme:

Positively, the prudential means of grace provide the structure, the parameters, through which the greatest advances in grace can be realized in Christian practice. In other words, prudential means are those which are considered prudent by an enlightened reason and by informed experience and which direct and guide the spiritual life as it continues to encounter the rich grace of God both in and through these particular practices. Wesley called them ‘arts of holy living.’”

Collins continues:

“...in the creation of prudential norms, reason must survey and assess tradition, experience, and general moral principles culled from scriptures. In drawing up prudential norms, the reason also looks at the goal of salvation, that is, the restoration of the image of God—all of this in order to determine the good for specific situations.”

Norris, it seems, is at least representative of the influences upon Wesley which helped him to distill how reason impacted the prudential means of grace.

In Wesley’s own *A Plain Account of the People Called the Methodists*, he lifts up the use of reason in helping to discern the way forward for both the movement and for those who sought advice on how to grow spiritually. It appears that from the outset it was not only the scriptures that framed Wesley’s development of the means of grace, but also reason and necessity. Many of the developments that later proved key to the success of Methodism, like the class meeting, the penny collection, and the watch night services, were driven by reason and necessity and became prudential means of God’s grace. Over and again in *A Plain Account of the People Called the Methodists* one can see the prudent and practical side of Wesley. Perhaps most telling are these words, “...the scripture, in most points, gives only general rules; and leaves the particular circumstances to be adjusted by the common sense of mankind...That is, they are methods which men have found, by reason and common sense, for the more effectually applying several Scriptural

rules, couched in general terms to particular occasions.”

Virtually any sermon of John Wesley reveals that while scripture carries the most weight with regard to authority, reason is championed as a virtue.

It is clear, then, that as John Wesley applied himself to the cause of holiness of heart and life, he drew from his experience and environment to adopt those practices which would be channels through which God could pour grace. These pious and reasoned practices Wesley termed the prudential means of grace.

The Interdependence of the Means of Grace

Wesleyan scholars agree that the means of grace permeated John Wesley’s writings throughout his lifetime. Wesley believed “...human salvation to be fundamentally a gradual therapeutic process that grows out of our responsive participation in God’s forgiving and empowering grace.” For Wesley, that participation was gathered up in the means of grace. The grace of God is conveyed to the believer through the means and the faithful response of the believer is conveyed back to God. Importantly, it is not the means in and of themselves that are salvific.

But we allow that the whole value of the means depends on their actual subservience to the end of religion; that consequently all these means, when separate from the end, are less than nothing, and vanity; that if they do not actually conduce to the knowledge and love of God they are not acceptable in his sight; yea, rather, they are an abomination before him; a stink in his nostrils; he is weary to bear them—above all if they are used as kind of ‘commutation’ for the religion they were designed to subserve.

Indeed, the whole goal of the Christian, for Wesley, was holiness of heart and life.

While Wesley wasn’t systematic in his approach to the means of grace, offering a checklist of sorts; he was directive, instructing his Methodists in the vital importance of

utilizing all the means of grace for Christian living.

It was here that the traditional means of grace of the Church of England were most vulnerable: people could come to them again and again without experiencing the presence of God. What was needed were other means of grace which would nurture faith through encouraging a receptive and expectant openness to God, and a faithful and loving response.

Seeing that from time to time the traditional means of grace in the Church of England grew routine and ceased to present occasions for spiritual progress, Wesley offered the prudential means to achieve these ends.

Knight captures one of the most important aspects of Wesley's means of grace- that they operate best when they operate together. For Wesley, there was no either-or approach to the means of grace. For him it was always a both-and proposition. Some have argued persuasively that the practice of the Lord's Supper held prominence in a subtle Wesleyan hierarchy of the means, but more than once Wesley extolls the virtues of all the means. In his General Rules, Wesley admonished Methodists to "avoid all sin, do as much good as one can, and attend all the ordinances (means) of God." While Wesley is explicitly referencing the instituted means in this quote, it seems clear in both his practice and his writing that all the means of grace, general, instituted, and prudential, function in harmony.

One can picture the 18th century Methodist faithfully attending the Church of England; hearing sermons, participating in the Lord's Supper, and experiencing the liturgy. But also attending a society meeting; gathering together for accountability, godly counsel, faithful instruction, hymn singing, testimonies, and prayer. For Wesley, both were essential to the pursuit of holiness of heart and life, and evident in his own personal

practice. Through any of these means the grace of God was conveyed in sanctifying ways.

It is important to note that the very innovations and adaptations of Wesley's ministry were legitimized by his theology of the means of grace. The hallmarks of the Methodist movement; societies, class meetings, bands, covenant services, conferencing, and love feasts, were all made possible because Wesley saw them as channels through which God's grace could flow. One might suggest that without this interdependence the ongoing influence of Wesley and the Methodists would have disappeared long ago. As Blevins rightly notes, Wesley appreciated the enduring practices of the instituted means, yet provided a way for transitory and beneficial prudential means. One could argue that the means of grace that are *distinctively* Wesleyan are all prudential. Yet Wesley was adamant that early Methodism was the *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* (church within the church). The larger church provided the liturgical worship and sacraments; the smaller intentional communities the nurture and accountability necessary for real transformation. Blevins points to the trinity as Wesley's model for the interdependence of the means of grace. God has ordained that the gracious, loving presence of Jesus Christ will be revealed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The various practices of the means of grace are then gifts of grace by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to reveal the grace of God in Christ. The different ways of knowing engendered in the various practices may work together for a better understanding of God. The faithful practice of the interdependent means of grace was Wesley's path to sanctification.

“Those who share Wesley's vision of the Christian life need at the same time to insist on a complete pattern of the means of grace.” In this spirit, then, this paper turns to the implications of the use of the means of grace in the church today.

The Implications of the Prudential Means of Grace

Without question, John Wesley was thoroughly grounded in the Anglicanism of his day and an orthodox theologian. Wesley was also a realist. As his ministry increasingly spread from the academy to the coal yards, Wesley developed a more robust understanding of the means of grace. While he never rejected the instituted means, he was able to understand and teach that God's sanctifying grace was conveyed through more than just the rituals of the Church of England. Wesley was willing to adapt a wide variety of concepts and practices that not only rounded out his theology, but more importantly made him highly effective in his pastoral ministry.

Is it possible that the Spirit was intuiting to Rev. Wesley the seeds of the means of grace even in Wesley's early statement regarding the general rules? Does it make sense to imagine that "...do as much good as one can" was an early impression of an openness to the prudential means of grace as they would eventually develop in Wesley's ministry?

Henry Knight's insistence that we frame Wesley's means of grace in the relationship one develops with God leads him to conclude that there is never a time in the believer's life when the means of grace are not necessary. He is convinced that against the false dichotomies of enthusiasm and formalism that beset Wesley's ministry, Wesley was eager to present the world a fresh perspective on grace. At the same time, Knight and others remind us never to attempt to simply replicate Wesley's means of grace in the modern day. A better alternative is to understand the spirit behind Wesley's means of grace and make fresh applications in current circumstances. This appears to swing wide the door for pastors and leaders in the 21st century to carefully explore new avenues for God's grace to be poured out on believers in pursuit of sanctification.

Similarly, Dean Blevins reminds theologians and Christian educators that the means of grace, in particular the prudential means, are best imagined as ways to engage people at the point of their need. The sheer complexity of human need surely calls for the church to enlist all of its creative prowess under the direction of the Holy Spirit to teach believers that God's grace is available. This approach recaptures the Spirit of Wesley for the modern day.

For Wesley, grace defined God's loving and uncreated presence; therefore, it was dynamic and applicable to the changing needs of people. Wesley didn't see grace confined to the practices of the official church, but certainly adopted and adapted new practices to urge people forward in the pursuit of holiness of heart and life.

Perhaps this idea is best seen by looking to Wesley, himself. One can observe in Wesley a dynamic relationship with the various means of grace as God blessed them and Christians were nurtured. Nearly every Wesley scholar would be able to create a list similar to the one offered here that outlines the ways that John Wesley applied his theology of the means of grace to his setting. Randy Maddox offers a near comprehensive explanation of Wesley's adaptations.

Though reluctant at first, Wesley eventually appreciated the value of extemporaneous prayer when coupled with the more formal prayers of the church. As time passed, Wesley also permitted the society meetings to evolve more into worship services as the people became more and more reluctant to attend the services of the Church of England. It was important to Wesley to adapt the Christian calendar, removing several of the holy days that seemed a distraction to his people. Wesley introduced the singing of hymns to worship as an innovation over the metrical psalms regularly used by

the formal church. He adopted and adapted the Moravian love feast for the use of his Methodists. In addition, he adapted the watch-night service and the covenant services to Methodist practice. Of course, the entire organization of societies, classes, and bands represent a foundational means of grace for Wesley, as did Christian conferencing. His reluctant use of lay preachers represents a significant departure from the formalized ordination processes of the Church of England, but Wesley discovered many who were effective, and he understood God to be conveying grace through their work. From the Puritans and the long tradition of the wider church, Wesley adapted his class meetings into a form of catechumenate for the Methodists. It was here that seekers were able to learn the foundations of the faith. Even things considered sacraments in other traditions, like foot-washing, were eventually seen by Wesley as means of grace. Maddox's list goes on, but it seems apparent that adaptation was an essential methodology for Wesley. Once again, it appears that Rev. Wesley offers modern pastors and leaders opportunities for the creative application of the means of grace.

Further Implications of the Prudential Means for Discipleship Renewal for the Church of the Nazarene

The implications of Wesley's application of the means of grace seem vital to the renewal of discipleship within the Church of the Nazarene. A quick glance at the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene* is encouraging as the phrase, "means of grace" is mentioned six times. Significantly, however, the means of grace are neither defined specifically nor applied in any transformational way. It appears that the use of the phrase connects to a corporate memory that has been lost over the decades. There is an implied relationship between the Nazarene goal of holiness and the means of grace, however the

church does not seem to explicitly connect the two in the way Wesley and the Methodists did. Sadly, then, the true impact of the prudential means of grace remains just out of reach to Nazarenes in pursuit of their therapeutic impact toward holiness.

That noted, with a bit of recovery work, Wesley's prudential means of grace do offer a framework in which the Nazarenes can work. The church can embrace, as Wesley did, creative and practical expressions of the faith without fear of becoming merely pragmatic. While always practical, the prudential means of grace are not given to the failures of pragmatism because the prudential means are always subordinate to the scriptures. In this way, the scriptures define and govern the inclusion of reasonable practices that mediate God's grace.

The prudential means of grace also focus clearly on the goal of holiness. In a consumeristic church era, whatever draws a crowd may be championed as effective, but all manner of things can draw a crowd. For something to be authentically prudential, it must serve to lead people onward in the work of sanctification. It must truly be a channel through which God can pour out grace. The faithful work of the Spirit can help the church discern what practices are effective at leading people toward sanctification.

Similarly, Wesley teaches the church to employ reason and common sense in evaluating the prudential means of grace. A kind of sanctified ingenuity characterized Wesley's system for making disciples. It is time to reimagine the methods that the Church of the Nazarene depends upon in disciple-making efforts.

As stated previously, while Wesley never created a comprehensive list of the means of grace, he had a knack for adapting to particular circumstances and an openness to many things being seen as means of grace. One might raise a concern that under these

qualifications Nazarene's could err by assuming that nearly anything might be construed as a means of grace. On this point Wesley was clear and offered at least two methods for qualifying as a means of grace. First, the proposed means had to clearly connect to the larger goal of holiness of heart and life. Second, Wesley was a careful evaluator. Only those things that were tried and proven effective as means engendering heart and life holiness were included in his teaching. Andrew Thompson sums up the spirit of Wesley when he says, Wesley's perspective is that the means of grace are "necessarily grounded in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, guided by the power of the Holy Spirit, and directed toward the salvation of the Christian believer." Though Wesley was clear that God could choose to act apart from the means of grace, it is apparent that he regarded the means of grace as normative and even indispensable. The implications of this approach are intriguing for Nazarenes.

In the spirit of Wesley, then, Nazarene's can begin to think creatively about discipleship. While innovation for its own sake or for the sake of attracting a crowd gives off the whiff of consumerism; innovation embraced for its ability to lead to holiness of heart and life is an authentically Wesleyan approach. Many are arguing for various reforms in the church writ large in these days, but reforms in the spirit of Wesley's Methodists are needed in the Church of the Nazarene specifically. The Church of the Nazarene is a denomination founded on the principles of heart change and life transformation, but its current ability to cultivate true life-transforming faith appears to be in question. "The traditional holiness denominations were a movement originally gathered around a distinctive emphasis on holiness of heart and life as the goal for all Christians. The member denominations now focus more on church growth and on being

assimilated into ‘respectable’ generic American evangelicalism.” A variety of cultural pressures may be summed up under the general heading of consumerism and threaten to reduce the church to a religious organization filled with well-intentioned people that are good citizens but not good followers of Jesus. This paper, then, returns to its original problem, now informed by the practices of early Methodism.

A Curriculum-based Approach to Renewal

As indicated, this research will culminate in a discipleship model that is distinctively a post-modern expression of an early Methodist prudential means of grace. This particular emphasis has valuable potential for discipleship renewal in the Church of the Nazarene. Before detailing that, however, an argument should be made for the specific genre of the discipleship model.

The specific discipleship model advocated in this dissertation is curriculum-based. A curriculum-based approach makes sense because essential parts of Wesley's revolutionary theology and methodology have been lost through time and across denominational lines. A curriculum designed to specifically address these lost concepts and practices must be reintroduced to modern-day Nazarenes. There is little hope for any real change in discipleship effectiveness apart from a focused re-training effort. The church needs new thinking.

The church also needs new practices. The particular curriculum offered in this proposal is characterized by an intensive eight-week training period. During this period, the participants will be introduced to the concepts in this dissertation. Following that, the participants will move from re-thinking into a three-month season of new practices. This period will invite the participants to hold one another lovingly accountable to a mutually

agreed upon covenant. In addition to meeting together for the eight-week training period the participants will receive a short daily devotional and a weekly practice intended to reinforce the work of the training and prepare them for the period of experience.

Additionally, this curriculum approach offers a component of repeatability. Once the five-month training and experience season is past, the group members will be invited either to continue with their group or move into leadership—taking others through the process they themselves have been through. Simultaneously, however, each spring and fall will find the Lead Pastor beginning this process afresh with new groups of disciples. The hope is that not only will the individuals experience a new level of heart and life holiness, but that the core identity of the church will, over time, be transformed into the vision of the Nazarenes as a people who are truly making Christlike disciples in the nations.

A curriculum model also makes sense because churches like Central Church of the Nazarene are accustomed to this approach. The publishing interests of the Church of the Nazarene have exposed its people to a steady supply of curriculum in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition across the church's history. In recent years, the church has offered curriculum-based emphases during chosen seasons of the church year or to address specific concerns in the broader society. Nazarenes may well be eager to get involved in a discipleship curriculum with the demonstrable effect of life-transformation.

A curriculum-based approach also sets itself up for natural seasons of engagement and rest. Kansas City Central Church of the Nazarene recruits for its Formation Groups (reframed Sunday School and small group ministries) in the spring and the fall. This leaves the busy seasons like Christmas and the summer as times of rest from this

emphasis. People prefer what small group gurus often refer to as easy “on ramps” and “off ramps.” Knowing how long something is expected to last often leads to better participation.

An important component of this particular curriculum is that the eight-week training will be adaptable into a digital format. This format could then be offered through video accompanied by a time of question and answer. Printed training materials will be supplied but the bulk of training could be offered digitally. Additionally, once the videos and digital versions of the curriculum are created, they could easily be connected to a smart-phone app. It seems that nearly every Central Nazarene has a smart phone. By placing the curriculum in the form of an app, the resources will be literally at the fingertips of the participants enabling the groups to meet nearly anywhere and effectively providing access to the training and experience that are “pandemic-proof.”

Finally, and most importantly, the particular curriculum proposed will champion accountability as the missing component in the Nazarene pursuit of holiness of heart and life. Small groups and Sunday School classes often offer excellent instruction, sound theology, and warm fellowship. They almost never require accountability for spiritual growth. The curriculum offered in this artifact elevates loving accountability as the most important missing ingredient in the discipleship efforts of Nazarenes today.

PART TWO: Accountable Discipleship as a Means to Holiness of Heart and Life

Watching Over One Another in Love

Wesley's desire to guide people into holiness of heart and life kept him busily adjusting his methods until he could find a practical and effective way forward. "Wesley's theological understanding...led him to adopt what first seemed an unbelievably straightforward solution: a weekly meeting of like-minded persons who would exercise a mutual accountability for their discipleship." A key component of Wesley's Methodists that gathers together this research is an expression of accountable discipleship that David Lowes Watson termed, "Covenant Discipleship." Wesley's letter referenced above, *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, summarizes what would eventually become a hallmark of Methodism. "They therefore united themselves 'in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they might help each other to work out their salvation.'" As previously noted, John Wesley brought together a lifetime of influences and experiences to discover a concept essential to holiness of heart and life. Suzanna Wesley's careful discipleship blended love and accountability into a pleasant encounter that D. Michael Henderson called "...warm and intimate sharing concerning the reality of God and the greatness of his provision and the joys of the Christian life." These weekly sessions with his mother created the furrows in the mind of young John where the seeds of group accountability would one day germinate.

Samuel Wesley's involvement in the early English Religious Societies taught John the importance of gathering for encouragement and accountability with a small group of

like-minded believers, and John joined the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in 1732. These societies patterned after the German Pietist influences mediated through Anthony Horneck, a Lutheran minister who had settled in England, were 18th century English expressions of the pietist, *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, or “the little church within the church.” These influences shaped the early academic career of Wesley and his formation of the Holy Club as a tutor at Oxford. This early expression of a small group under Wesley's leadership was a forerunner to future iterations of accountable discipleship.

Wesley's mission to America gave him a further laboratory in which to test his evolving methodology. His efforts were met with varying degrees of success, but the voyage back to England would expose Wesley to the Moravians whose simple faith and practical group organization would lead not only to his Aldersgate experience but also to his initial efforts in Methodist classes and bands. Wesley's passion for holiness motivated him to adapt effective methods he encountered in order to provide a system for watching over the spiritual development of the early Methodists.

Wesley built these classes and bands around a methodological component that is largely missing from the post-modern American Nazarene Church. At the very core of the success of the Methodist revival was John Wesley's insistence on accountability. It was Wesley who, after preaching, gathered together those who had been awakened and organized them into smaller groups where there would be an ongoing sense of accountability for spiritual progress toward holiness. As is often noted, it was in a sense, easier to *join* a Methodist group than it was to *remain* in one. Yet it is precisely this accountability that made spiritual awakenings stick and grow into holiness of heart and life.

The Early Methodist Class Meeting

The class meeting served as the most influential instructional unit in Methodism and probably Wesley's greatest contribution to the church. The class meeting also provided the context where all Methodists were held accountable for their spiritual growth. Henry Ward Beecher said, "The greatest thing John Wesley ever gave to this world is the Methodist class meeting." Dwight L. Moody, 19th century revivalist, offered this commendation: "The Methodist class meetings are the best institutions for training converts the world ever saw." With class meetings Wesley was able to finally fulfill his heart's desire to help people make progress in the pursuit of holiness. The tutelage of his homelife, the experiences in America, the influence of the Pietists, and the successes of the Oxford Holy Club would have a format to be worked into the lives of those desiring God like yeast into dough, permeating and bringing about lasting change. Through class meetings Wesley believed his followers were closest to the societal norms of the first century Christians and tapping into the roots of primitive Christianity.

The Origins of the Class Meeting

For the informed reader, that Wesley discovered this means of accountability by accident may be no surprise. In an effort to retire the debt of the Society in Bristol, the idea was adopted to have a weekly penny collection from every member of the society. Once instituted something surprising began to happen. Those who were visited in the collection of the offering soon began to share about the condition of their souls. Wesley took note of this and soon discovered the means of accountability that would mark Methodism for all of time. "This is the thing; the very thing we have wanted so long." I called together all the leaders of the classes (so we used to term them and their

companies) and desired that each would make a particular inquiry into the behavior of those who he saw weekly...as soon as possible, the same method was used in London and all other places.” Thus began the early Methodist class meeting.

That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies called “classes,” according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in every class, one of who is styled the Leader. It is his business: (1) To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require: to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor...

Before very long the idea of visiting each member of a society in person became impractical and the society members were invited to a weekly gathering. In time, these meetings became a weekly means of accountability as the participants not only gave an offering of money, but also an offering of transparent accountability for the condition of their souls. Initially, the groups met wherever they could gather with ten or twelve members: schools, shops, attics, and even coalbins. Later, however, as the movement grew, Methodist chapels were constructed to house the class meetings in locations more convenient to the members.

The format was surprisingly simple and effective. After beginning precisely on the hour, a hymn was sung, and the leader began by giving a short testimonial to the condition of his/her soul. The leader’s role was crucial as it set the tone for the vulnerability of the rest of the group. Open sharing regarding the successes and failures of the leader invited similar vulnerability in the members. Importantly, the class meetings were not designed for doctrinal ideology or scriptural instruction. The order of the day was personal experiences in walking out the pursuit of holiness. This created an informal

but highly effective leveling among the members engendering a spirit of nurture and collegiality.

Remarkable for a religious movement of his day, John Wesley did not shy away from the realities of the struggles of people in their pursuit of Christ. Instead, Wesley prepared for it and created a system of nurturing accountability that faced the realities of sin with clear correction, but in an environment of love and mutuality. Wesley's conceptions of God's grace and God's provision through the means of grace created in him a kind of holy optimism about the potential for transformation into the likeness of Christ.

The Class Meeting in Wesley's Organizational System

Wesley's reticence to part with the Church of England meant that Methodism would not, at least during his lifetime, become a substitute for the church. Wesley considered his Methodists to be *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, or the "little church" within the "big church. The various meetings of the Methodists were carefully scheduled so as not to conflict with the services of the Church of England. Wesley's intentions, as noted, were not to compete with the church but rather to provide a component missing from the larger church, namely, a vehicle for the pursuit of holiness of heart and life.

D. Michael Henderson contends that the basic components of Wesley's Methodist system were set by 1742. There would be small adjustments along the way, but for the most part the die was cast. The first category of the system was the Society. The society was intended to include all of the Methodists in a given locale. Henderson sees the society as the umbrella category for all of Methodism. "The primary function of the society was cognitive instruction: it was the educational channel by which the tenets of

Methodism were presented to the target population.” Since merely education seldom leads to transformation, Wesley continued to refine his discipleship process.

Chronologically, the next category Wesley created were the Bands. Wesley envisioned these as a necessary further *ecclesiola* from the societies. His idea was straightforward; people would be grouped together and taken through a series of questions in a catechetical manner. The questions pulled no punches:

1. Have you peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ?
2. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?
3. Do you desire to be told of your faults?
4. Do you desire that every one of us should tell you, from time to time, whatsoever is in his heart concerning you?
5. Do you desire that, in doing this, we should come close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?

At least two things seem obvious from this line of questioning. The first is a glimpse into Wesley's upbringing and perhaps what it would have been like in the Holy Club. The second is, according to David Lowes Watson, that this intensity, especially for the newly converted, was a case of “too much too soon.” Ordinary working-class converts were not yet ready to deepen their faith in this way. They were simply trying to hold on to what faith they already had. Wesley loved this category and it would remain in Methodism, but something else was needed between the society and the band.

As detailed above, the class meeting was precisely the instrument that Wesley sought. It was stringent enough to engage and challenge the new Methodists, yet not so advanced as to overwhelm them. Additionally, the accountability was transferred to the group which inevitably governed the intensity of the interactions initially and enabled the group to progress together.

This category Wesley would term “that excellent institution.” He likened it to the

“sinews” which hold together the human body and as a result, the class meeting was the very muscle of the Methodist movement. Wesley intuited that he had found the means to the desired end of holiness. He would champion the class meeting until his death.

How Wesley's Class Meeting Reflects a Prudential Means of Grace

Wesley considered his entire group system to be an effort to return to the primitive faith of the New Testament church. The class meeting was the most widely practiced and effective expression of this conviction. The genesis of Wesley's methodology was in the scriptures. He understood his preaching and teaching to be driving the Methodists back to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. To build upon the argument made previously in this paper that the means of grace operate best *en masse*. Wesley instructed his Methodists to give themselves to the instituted means, but to also engage in the prudential means. Perhaps more important than any of the other identified prudential means of Methodism, was Wesley's insistence on a small group structure for training converts. In the class meeting, Wesley understood his Methodists to be recovering the faith of the early church.

The various strata for discipleship developed by Wesley were all born of necessity. With his singular focus on holiness of heart and life and in view of the ineffectiveness of the church in his day to produce it, Wesley found ways to engage people that led to real life transformation. In his sermon, *Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity*, a mature Wesley bemoaned the lack of real Christians in his day. He understood his approach of gathering together in loving accountability those who were “desperate to flee the wrath to come,” to be a reasoned response to the situation at hand. By the occasion of this sermon, Wesley had had many years to observe the impact of his

structure and its effectiveness. It was a practical response to be sure, but it was also clearly, a necessary one. In order to attain the goal of holiness, Wesley acted upon his understanding of the means of grace to create the environment to enable it. The class meeting, with its insistence upon loving accountability, was that environment. The long view from Wesley's perspective enabled him to repeat in this sermon an early Christian proverb: "The soul and body make a man; the spirit and discipline make a Christian." Wesley's insistence on attendance in the class meeting as a prudential means of grace is his practical expression of discipline that makes a Christian.

Recent Efforts in the Methodist Movement

There has been no shortage of calls for those who have inherited the Wesleyan tradition to return to the roots of the class and band structure. The most prominent effort to this end is the work done by David Lowes Watson. His books recapturing the spirit of the class meeting were the foundation for the General Conference of the United Methodist Church's adoption of his methodology as its discipleship strategy in the 1990's. While Watson is a scholar in Wesleyanism, his "Covenant Discipleship" is not merely a recapitulation of Wesley's class meeting, but is rather an effective adaptation of it into a covenant-based group gathering that retains the accountability championed by Wesley, but packages it in a 20th century approach. Many of his ideas were instrumental in the thinking behind the artifact for this dissertation. L. Gregory Jones in his work on Christian social innovation, calls this kind of reclaiming and repackaging work *traditioned innovation* because it "honors and engages the past while adapting to the future...It forces us to ask fundamental questions about who we are and what purpose we have for existing: Who have we been, and now, in shifting circumstances, who will we

continue to be?” Jones argues that the best route to social innovation, and indeed the route that John Wesley employed in the 18th century, is paying attention not only to the current need, but also exploring the vitality of Christian belief and practice across the centuries.

Kevin M. Watson (not to be confused with the aforementioned David Lowes Watson) in his article, “The Form and Power of Godliness: Wesleyan Communal Discipline as Voluntary Suffering,” adds his voice to the chorus of others lamenting the condition of discipleship in the Methodist Church. Kevin Watson’s particular complaint is that Methodists have lost sight of the loving accountability of the class meeting. No shortage of scholars agree including Maddox, Collins, Knight, and Snyder. Randy Maddox summarizes well:

One of Wesley's most central pastoral convictions was that authentic spiritual formation cannot take place “without society, without living and conversing with [others].” This is what led Wesley to create corporate structures to provide his Methodist people with mutual support for their spiritual journey. The most basic structure was the class meeting, and one of its central values was the balance of encouragement and accountability it provided.

With all of these voices calling for renewal and Wesley's clear belief in it, it is surprising to note that, according to David Lowes Watson, the efforts to recapture the accountability of the early class meeting are no longer priorities in the United Methodist Church. Watson cites financial cutbacks at the General Conference level and the elimination of positions on the Board of Discipleship with the elimination of the Covenant Discipleship emphasis. Sadly, it appears, that this emphasis was the last time the Methodists made a concerted denominational effort toward anything resembling the class meeting. With the Methodist Church moving away from this emphasis, perhaps the

time is right for fellow descendants of the Wesleyan tradition to take up the cause.

Key and Transferable Components of the Class Meeting to a Nazarene Setting

Making application of these concepts to the Church of the Nazarene must begin with noting that John Wesley, the Covenant Discipleship movement, and the Nazarene's share a common target; helping people grow in holiness. Nothing was more central to Wesley's goals than to overcome the nominal faith of his day. Certainly, this passion, while central to the historical formation of the Nazarene's, is waning in these days and must be resuscitated. Key to any recovery of the methodology of Wesley will mean cultivating a biblically grounded and theologically balanced sense of what it means to be a real disciple. The concept of accountable discipleship is aimed primarily at this target and the class meeting was the environment where Wesley saw it happen. There is a genuine hunger in the lives of American Nazarene's to actually make progress in the holiness so often proclaimed in its churches. By a traditioned innovation of the underlying principles of the early Methodist class meeting, this hunger can be addressed.

To this end, a fresh representation of the principles of the class meeting are a tangible expression of the means of grace as Wesley understood and taught them. That the class meeting was clearly a prudential means of grace has been established, but for post-modern Nazarene's the concept of the means of grace remains vague. The goal of one's salvation is not "unilaterally infused by God at one's conversion. It must be cultivated as part of the intentional process of growing in Christlikeness." The presentation of a refreshed expression of accountable discipleship will demonstrate actual growth in grace and Christlikeness enabling a basic understanding of the means of grace and opening the person to even deeper understanding of the ordinary channels of grace

God uses. Accountable discipleship works because it trains the participant, through grace, to be more like Christ. Like an athlete who submits to repetition and hard work in order to achieve mastery, so the Christian grows in holiness when she/he practices the disciplines of accountable discipleship.

Similarly, Nazarene's can benefit from the traditioned innovation of the class meeting because the focus is less on pedagogy and biblical expertise and more on the catechetical practice of living together by covenant. This approach will be new to most Nazarene congregations. As noted, most Sunday School and small group ministries today fall into the respective ditches of either lecture-based instruction or surface-level sharing about common concerns. The class meeting centers around a new approach of holding one another accountable to previously agreed upon expressions of the means of grace. The groups having been introduced to the principles of Wesley and the means of grace, meet together around the covenant they have created and, in a question-and-answer format, "watch over one another in love," being sure that members are living into the agreement formed by the group.

Likewise, these groups will model two things largely missing from postmodern churches—vulnerability and accountability. In the refreshed class meeting model, the leader goes first in honestly relating her/his successes and failures in living into the agreed upon covenant. In so doing, the leader is modeling the means of relating for the rest of the group. The early Methodist class meeting demonstrated the power of this simple approach. As Christians openly shared in an environment built around the expectation that the covenant would be upheld, life transformation took place. This can be recaptured in Nazarene Churches today.

Finally, there are a host of other important principles of the early Methodist class meeting that can be translated into today's Nazarene settings. Wesley's groups were not specifically linked to age. While certainly set up for adults, there was an element of intergenerational participation that could be recovered in churches today. Wesley's groups were divided up by geography more than anything else, so that members could take seriously the call to loving accountability. Nazarene's could benefit from this intergenerational approach to adult discipleship. Women were also key leaders in the early Methodist classes. How complimentary to the Nazarene emphasis on equality this would be if churches fully embraced accountable discipleship groups being led by both women and men. This model also lends itself to repeatability. The nature of the covenant-based group is less dependent on the personality of the leader or the specific makeup of the members. Instead, the emphasis is on the faithful following of the agreed upon covenant. Nearly anyone can lead and still realize the effectiveness of the methodology. For similar reasons, this makes the accountable discipleship model accessible to any congregation whose attendees are serious about the pursuit of holiness. Inevitably, while not the only goal, the covenant-based discipleship model does foster strong connections between its members. People who share from their hearts on a regular basis develop strong ties to one another and to their common goals for spiritual growth. This depth of relationship will only help the church. Lastly, the early Methodist class meeting became the first level of leadership training for the movement. Class leaders who proved faithful and effective often became a part of Wesley's greater leadership structure. How essential for the renewal of the church to be led by people who are serious in their pursuit of holiness. A pastor could, in time, realize an entirely new group of leaders based not on

popularity or longevity, but upon participation in the transformational practices of accountable discipleship.

A Contemporary Model of Accountable Discipleship for Kansas City Central Church

This accountability must be a part of any efforts toward true discipleship renewal within the Church of the Nazarene. While worship services are essential, even from a Wesleyan perspective, they offer very little accountability. Small groups offer places to connect with others and share life experiences in the context of Christian fellowship, yet precious few offer any accountable expectations that the members will make tangible progress toward holiness. Even the Sunday School with its classic interest in biblical instruction, lacks a strong sense of accountability in post-modern America.

What is needed is a new effort to re-form American Nazarene's in the essential importance of accountability as it relates to life-transformation. While perhaps a new expression of discipleship within the Nazarene church, this emphasis on accountability should not come as a surprise to Americans. No one would argue with the effectiveness of the Alcoholics Anonymous groups or Saddleback Community's Celebrate Recovery. Both of these highly effective programs have accountability to others as a centerpiece. Similarly, Americans regularly adopt Weight Watchers or other weight loss programs which require accountability through weekly weigh-ins and input from a coach. Likewise, Cross-fit and other similar movements are sweeping America. They require participants to join a group, show up to workouts, and pay a fee all to help them achieve their fitness goals. Americans seem to have figured out that actual change happens best in the context of supportive accountability to others. What these relatively recent movements hold as of critical importance was actually figured out long ago in

Methodism's groups; namely that supportive accountability leads to lasting change.

This dissertation proposes an eight-week small group experience designed to hold participants accountable to the core message of the Church of the Nazarene, the message of holiness, as it contrasts the counter-formational message of consumerism. The eight weeks will culminate in the creation of a group covenant similar to those created in the class meetings in early Methodism. Following the creation of the covenant, the groups will remain together for three months, holding one another accountable to their mutually agreed upon practices. Taken together, then, the five-month time period will give participants a chance to not only learn but be molded through loving accountability into the people God has called them to be. At the end of the five months, the group members will be invited to either remain in the covenant-based group or become group leaders themselves. Those who choose leadership will find a group of people to nurture in the same ways they have been nurtured for five months.

While other group models exist and are widely used, none of them share the unique blend of accountability, sustainability, and multiplication that the covenant-based discipleship model offers. Additionally, this proposed model emerges from within the Church of the Nazarene and is designed with the end goal of holiness of heart and life. In nearly all other cases the discipleship model offered is either generically evangelical or decidedly something other than Wesleyan-Arminian in focus. Nazarene's are forced to either accept the denominational ambiguity or re-work the curriculum to fit a Nazarene theological framework. Finally, the proposed model will fit within the framework of most Nazarene churches who typically offer Sunday School or small group options. This proposal is unique and will not be a duplication of existing models. For this reason, it

may exist either alongside current local church offerings or as an alternative approach to discipleship.

Standards of Publication

In order to create an artifact of this dissertation that meets the professional standards of publication, the author consulted with Mike Wonch, Senior Editor for the Foundry Publishing Company. The Foundry Publishing Company “seeks to more effectively spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the world’s leading publisher of Wesleyan-Holiness resources, we are called to give voice to a radically optimistic theology of transformation.” Both the long history of this company as a professional publisher and its alignment with the theological aims of this project made them the perfect choice for this project. The author is grateful to Mike Wonch for his willingness to lend his expertise to this artifact.

The agreed upon arrangement involved Mr. Wonch reading the proposal for the artifact and assisting with outlining its parameters. In specific, he suggested that an overview of the project spelling out specifically where the project is headed would be of benefit to the reader. Additionally, he suggested that each section should then be broken down carefully to describe what the various components of the curriculum are intended to accomplish. For instance, what is the purpose of the eight-week training lessons? How does each lesson move the reader toward the end goal? What is the theme of each lesson? How will the content be presented? Likewise, how does the weekly practice reinforce each of the eight lessons? What questions should the participants learn to ask before, during, and after the weekly practice to enhance learning? Mr. Wonch also suggested that the format for the weekly sessions be carefully considered. How will the group come

together for an opening? Will the format of the teaching be lecture or open forum discussion? How will the lesson facilitate the application of what is learned? How will each session close and what are the expectations between sessions? In specific, Mr. Wonch also suggested creating the artifact with a specific timeframe in mind. Will the sessions last 30, 45, or 60 minutes? The design should carefully provide enough content for the desired time. Mr. Wonch suggested that there is some “art” to finding this balance between too much and not enough content. He also suggested to test the first lesson on a group before continuing as a means of exposing any unclear communication or time estimates. Since the artifact also contains a daily devotional component, Mr. Wonch suggested clear instructions on how to use the devotional section and what is needed to get the most benefit from them. Finally, Mr. Wonch agreed to review the final format and offer any further critique as he would for any other curriculum offerings coming through his office at The Foundry.

Teaching Methodology

The specific name for the artifact emerging from this research is Covenant Formation Groups (CFG). Kansas City Central has adopted the term Formation Group to be a broad umbrella under which all of its discipleship emphases are housed. This terminology was selected as it better expressed the church's efforts to not simply maintain programming, but to have its people formed into the likeness of Christ. This artifact is distinguished as a Covenant Formation Group so that in the broader publications of Central Church's discipleship offerings, it may be distinguished as unique.

Covenant Formation Groups: A Wesleyan Response for Kansas City Central

The specific format of the artifact was chosen as it accurately represents a Wesleyan response to the proposed problem at Central Church. For Wesley, "belief was always connected to actions." The CFG model is built with an instructional and experiential component in light of this. Maddox writes,

Wesley would be the first to insist that careful doctrinal formation alone cannot affect this change. Transformation into Christ's likeness is possible only by God's empowering and renewing grace at work in our lives. That is why Wesley moves from emphasis on doctrine in his diagnostic sermon to insisting that development of real Christians also requires discipline.

Maddox rightly draws this conclusion from Wesley's sermon, *The Great Privilege of Those Born of God*, where Wesley says, "God does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul re-acts upon God...He first loves us, and manifests himself unto us...He will not continue to breathe into our soul unless our soul breathes toward him again; unless our love, and prayer, and thanksgiving return to him." Here is the rationale for Wesley and ultimately this artifact. The grace of God and human responsibility are not

polar opposites but rather work together for Wesley. God's grace and human response are what authentic Christianity looks like. The CFG model attempts to marry these two concepts in a practical expression of discipleship. If Central Church hopes to reverse the impact of nominal Christianity on its parishioners and reinvigorate the pursuit of holiness of heart and life it will need to recommit to this Wesleyan model of grace and response. Covenant Formation Groups are an essential step in the right direction.

To fail in this regard is to place Nazarenes in a kind of parallel with Wesley's observations in 1763.

I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that re awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer. How much preaching has there been for these twenty years all over Pembrokeshire! But no regular societies, no discipline, no order of connection. And the consequence is that nine in ten of the once awakened are now faster asleep than ever.

The failure to link doctrine with practice was bemoaned by Wesley then and echoes to this day in churches like Kansas City Central. The CFG model attempts to do for post-modern Nazarene's what the class meeting did for 18th century Methodists.

The Teaching Component

The concepts engaged in this paper are not common knowledge to the average Kansas City Central Nazarene, yet they are essential to introducing the concept of Covenant Formation Groups to the church. As a result, there must be a teaching component to this artifact. Many Nazarenes are unaware of the dramatic impact American consumerism is having on them and their church. Discipleship, then, is seen as a kind of "optional discipline" for those who are really serious about the Christian life. Of course, nothing could be further from the scriptural or Wesleyan reality, but nevertheless this

notion is strong. There must be a re-introduction to the scriptural understanding of discipleship and John Wesley's interpretation is the historic, if neglected, best approach for Nazarenes. It is in both Wesley's theology and methodology that a solution to the church's discipleship dilemma becomes apparent. In particular, teaching around Wesley's means of grace will be a welcome return to a vital doctrine long neglected in Nazarene congregations, and will open the door, through the prudential means, to creative thinking and solutions to waning discipleship effectiveness. Unfortunately, churches like Kansas City Central have offered dozens of discipleship emphases over the years, most of which were program-heavy and light on actual life change. Instruction around the CFG model will be refreshing and provide not only renewed understanding but a practical and repeatable model for the days ahead. These reasons underlie the creation of the eight-week instructional component of the artifact.

The Experiential Component

As stated above, teaching alone is not sufficient for life change. Wesley built the Methodists around the affirmation that belief must always connect to actions. In light of this, the artifact for this project also has an experiential component. Following the seventh week of training, the participants in the CFG will work together to create a covenant upon which they all agree to hold one another accountable. The covenant will undoubtedly reflect new insights from the weeks of training but may also nuance some older principles which have never been fully embodied by the members. Once the covenant is complete, the experiential portion of the CFG begins, the group members will meet, very much in the fashion of the class meeting, to watch over one another in loving accountability. Like the early Methodists, this simple practice will result in lasting life

change for the participants.

The experiential component is essential because, as Wesley instinctively knew, practice repeated over time helps to habituate virtue. Not altogether unlike the countless hours invested in their craft by virtuosos or star athletes, the repeated practice of godliness under the loving accountability of others brings about holiness of heart and life. This reality helps to explain the relatively long, by local church programming standards, three-month period of the CFG. It simply takes time to learn new holy habits. Additionally, the experiential component of the CFG will help to break the isolationist tendencies of much of modern evangelicalism. The “me and Jesus” mindset of many Nazarene’s will initially chafe at the thought of loving accountability, but when the desire for holiness meets with the work of God’s Spirit, loving accountability will reveal itself as the way forward. Just as those who finally decide to lose weight, get in shape, or break an addiction have shown, the power of the group makes a difference. This paper argues that accountability is the missing link in the post-modern church and without it, the church’s future is bleak. In this light, it is also apparent that the input of others in an environment like a CFG will help to identify when growth is taking place. Often it requires the perspective of another to give one an unbiased assessment of growth. Finally, and most importantly, the CFG model offers built-in accountability. The uniqueness of this model is that it is not contingent upon the theological training of the leader but is instead firmly rooted in the mutually agreed upon covenant. The covenant orders the session and provides the “curriculum” for each meeting.

Covenant Formation Groups in Detail

Purpose

As those pursuing weight loss, physical fitness, or overcoming addiction have learned, accountability is the key to lasting change. Covenant Formation Groups (CFG) provide this accountability through members “watching over one another in love,” a phrase coined by John Wesley. Wesley was driven to see Christians truly become disciples of Jesus Christ and discovered that accountability was essential to this end. Wesley engendered life transformation through the early Methodist class meetings. CFG are a traditioned innovation of this 18th century Methodist hallmark. By meeting together around a mutually agreed upon covenant, the members of Covenant Formation Groups will experience real and lasting change in their own pursuit of Christlikeness.

Scope

The process for Covenant Formation Groups (CFG) is divided into eight weeks of training, followed by three months of experience. Once the five-month training and experience have concluded, members may choose to either remain in the group, or prepare for leadership of their own CFG, leading others through the process they have just completed.

Importantly, this curriculum will be presented as an important next step for many in Central Church and will require a special level of commitment from would-be participants. Wesley considered attendance at the class meeting to be mandatory. A whole-hearted commitment to the CFG will be required for admittance. Participants will be encouraged to attend in person but if they are unable on a limited basis, electronic

options are encouraged. If a person simply cannot commit to the five-month schedule, that person should be encouraged to wait until her/his schedule is more conducive.

The Eight-Week Training

Participants will be asked to meet for 75 minutes for each of the eight training sessions. Each session is designed to inspire participants to move from wanting to pursue holiness but not knowing where to begin, to a Wesleyan-holiness methodology adapted from John Wesley himself. Wesley saw demonstrable life change and so will participants as they learn and practice Covenant Discipleship.

The eight weeks are broken into the following sessions:

Week One – “Fish in Water: The American Church and Consumerism”

Week Two – “Forest and Trees: The American Church’s Discipleship Dilemma”

Week Three – “Back to the Future: John Wesley as a Way Forward”

Week Four – “Grace Enough: Holiness of Heart and Life and Responsible
Grace”

Week Five – “From Here to There: John Wesley and the Means of Grace”

Week Six – “From Here to There: John Wesley and the Means of Grace” (Part 2)

Week Seven – “Watching Over One Another In Love: Accountability and
Discipleship”

Week Eight – “Covenant Formation Groups: Building a Covenant Together

Session Format:

Catching up with Each Other (relational connection): The sessions will begin

with a few moments of casual interaction as participants catch up on the week's activities. Learning to interact with fellow participants will strengthen relational connections and enhance interaction. (5 minutes)

Praying for One Another (prayer): The Group Leader will then call the group together and lead in an opening time of prayer asking for God's help in learning and growing in holiness. (3 minutes)

Getting to Know One Another (ice-breaker question): The Group Leader will ask a simple question designed to get the group interacting and to engage the general topic of the lesson. (5 minutes)

Discussion Questions: Each session will be supplemented by discussion questions designed to inspire peer-to-peer learning among the participants.

Weekly Practice: At the close of each session, participants will be invited to engage in a weekly practice specifically designed to reinforce the training received.

Application: The session will be closed with applications made to everyday life in a discussion format, followed by a closing prayer for God's help in living into all that was learned.

Daily Devotional: Each day the participants will receive a daily devotional to be used for scripture reading, contemplation, and journaling along the lines of the received training. This daily interaction with God through the scriptures and prayer will give the Spirit of God the chance to remind participants each day of their commitment to grow in grace.

Covenant Writing: The final session will invite the group members to write a

covenant upon which they mutually agree to be used as the format for the ensuing five-month CFG experience.

The Covenant Writing Process

The concept of Covenant Discipleship was revived by David Lowes Watson for the United Methodist Church, as described earlier. In his book, *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability*, he outlines the process of covenant writing. Where Dr. Watson has “traditioned” the general rules of the Methodists in his covenant groups, this project has elected to work from the “Covenant of Christian Conduct” in the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, 2017-2021* as a starting place for every CFG. Using paragraphs 28 through 28.3, the CFG covenant should be written using the following guidelines:

1. The covenant should represent the group’s desire to pursue a “new and holy way of life.” This focus matches perfectly John Wesley's emphasis on holiness of heart and life.
2. The basis for this covenant should be Holy Scriptures.
3. The covenant should, with the help of the Holy Spirit, be careful to avoid all evil and embrace the good in accordance with I Thessalonians 5: 21-22, which says, “Test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.”

Beyond this foundation, the covenant should fall within the following parameters:

1. The covenant should represent the aspirations of the group members but also be a document of grace recognizing that only with the help of the Spirit will the participants be able to live into the covenant. Additionally, people are bound to have good and not so good weeks. Grace should be extended while at the same

time encouraging the efforts to keep trying.

2. The covenant in and of itself is not magic. It is, rather, a means of grace in the tradition of the early Methodists. Participants should be reminded that God will use this means as they cooperate with God in response.
3. A brief preamble to the covenant should be written that grounds the covenant in the work of the Spirit and reminds the group weekly of their common goal.
4. The clauses of the covenant should be agreed upon by all as reasonably attainable on a weekly basis.
5. The number of clauses is not pre-determined but should be set by the group as they consider covering each of them in the allotted one-hour weekly meeting.
6. A conclusion to the covenant should be written to summarize again the group's dependence upon the help of God, and the group's support for one another.
7. The covenant should then be signed by every member and a copy given to each member to keep and refer to often as a reminder of their commitment to grow in holiness of heart and life.

(See appendix 2 for a sample covenant)

The Three-Month Experience

Having completed the training and written a mutually agreed upon covenant, the CFG experience will proceed as follows:

- First, group members will gather and spend five minutes in relational updates.
- The Group Leader will then call the group to order and pray.

- Next the Group Leader will go first and offer her/his assessment of living up to the agreed upon covenant. This will take place as a group member is selected to inquire of the Group Leader's successes or failures in living up to the covenant in a question and answer (catechetical) format. For example, "John, how did it go this week as you tried to live more simply?" Group members will be invited to offer helpful comment.
- The group then proceeds one after the other to go over each part of the agreed upon covenant, assessing her/his successes and failures in living up to the covenant. The Group Leader will ask the questions of each member and facilitate any group comments.
- Once the members have all given their personal assessments, the Group Leader will summarize with observations and close the meeting in prayer.
- It is important that the meetings last no more than one hour so that participants may find it possible to work this gathering into their already busy lives.

Covenant language is the language of the scriptures, both Old Testament and New Testament. Scholars believe that the Hebrew word for covenant is derived from an Assyrian word meaning *shackle* or *fetter*. In this light, the value of a covenant format for this artifact is revealed. Participants in the CFG are binding themselves with both an unfailing God and a supportive community. This "vertical" and "horizontal" relationship is anchored in the Great Commandment where Christians are directed to love God and neighbor, and in a cruciform life anchored in Jesus' cross itself an expression of supreme

love of God and humanity. The value of the CFG is that it is a daily reminder of the simplicity and power of the covenant with God and fellow participants. May God bless the Covenant Formation Group as means of grace in the twenty-first century Nazarene Church as God blessed the class meeting of the early Methodists.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the author's efforts to link John Wesley's prudential means of grace to the contemporary church's waning pursuit of holiness should not end with this research. Several intriguing possibilities remain for future study, a few of which will be offered here.

Implications for Future Study

The research in this dissertation only scratches the surface in the rediscovery of the Church of the Nazarene's roots in John Wesley. Wesley's *via media* offered an alternative solution to the extremes of his day. While Wesley battled, for instance, the extremes of enthusiasm on the one hand, and formalism on the other; post-modern Nazarene's are faced with a host of challenges. Dr. Frank Moore, Director of Communications for the Church of the Nazarene, lists the following as current Nazarene emphases that threaten to distract the church from its stated mission of making Christlike disciples in the nations: a social justice gospel, a prosperity gospel, Neo-Pentecostalism, Process Theology, Open Theism, LGBTQ agenda, political reform agenda, racism and white privilege reform, a new Judaism. While Dr. Moore is not commenting on the relative value of these emphases to the church, he is indicating that the focus of the church is struggling due to what he calls a "fractured message." It seems that John Wesley was able to navigate the turbulent social and religious forces of his day. Perhaps

further research into Wesley's work would help the Nazarene's discover a unifying message in a sea of ideas.

Another exciting possibility would be further investigation into the power of covenant-based discipleship in the Church of the Nazarene. Supportive accountability is largely missing from the church today, yet Wesley's early Methodists proved its value when engaged as means of grace. As the culture has rediscovered the power of social networking, it seems that the church, in recovering its Wesleyan roots, might lead the way in “watching over one another in love.” The CFG model offered here is but one limited example of the ways a congregation might engage accountability in its discipleship efforts. Other ways might include exploring written covenants for staff pastors and church leadership; the development of a “connection committee” to offer loving accountability for attendance in weekly worship or in the other means of grace; and department specific CFG that set expectations for children, teens, young adults, volunteers in worship leading, and all Formation Group/small group leaders. A church that rediscovers and implements loving accountability in the spirit of Wesley will be entering into renewal that may result in revival.

Reflections on this Dissertation's Focus

As with most challenging projects, about the time one reaches the end, one can best begin to see the limitations of the work. An area where this research would have benefited would be a deeper look into Wesley's means of grace and the remnants of them in Nazarene doctrine. While acknowledging the historic Nazarene connection to Wesley and the Methodists through covenant-based discipleship, there are undoubtedly other places where the means of grace could rise to the surface of Nazarene doctrine and

practice. Prevalent, in some Nazarene circles, is a re-emphasis on the sacrament of the Lord's supper. This expression of the instituted means of grace offers exciting and helpful opportunities. Additionally, the exploration of Wesley's prudential works of mercy also offers a change to embrace the current interest in social justice without falling into the trap of undercutting the gospel. A renewed interest in the prudential means of grace offers to the Nazarene's a nearly limitless avenue to express creativity in the arena of making Christlike disciples. As Nazarenes maintain Wesley's primacy of scripture and focus on holiness, a kind of sanctified ingenuity is called forth.

Another practical expression of this dissertation would be to see both the training and the Covenant Formation Groups offered in a digital format. The ubiquity of the smart phone in the hands of Central Nazarene's would place the CFG literally at the fingertips of Central's attendees. In light of the current global pandemic, this would enable the vital pursuit of holiness to continue even if the church building needed to be temporarily closed. The training was developed with this in mind and through quality video, a few reformatting efforts, and the development of a smart phone app, this vision could become reality.

Recommendations for Building on this Project

An exciting potential for the expansion of the CFG that has been explored by David Lowes Watson in the United Methodist Church, is the recovery of the class leader as a lay minister. While the implementation of his specific model will not quite fit the Nazarene polity, enhancing the awareness of and training for the lay minister in the Church of the Nazarene is a logical next step. The potential for championing the cause of discipleship in the local church aside, the lay minister potentially multiplies the influence

of the pastor for leadership and pastoral care. This seems to be a clear expression of a Nazarene angle on the prudential means of grace as any church would benefit from an expansion of pastoral care both for engaged parishioners and those not yet affiliated with the church.

Another immediate next step that is missing from this artifact is a concrete plan to institute Covenant Formation Groups with both the pastoral staff and lay leadership of the local church. A common problem associated with new local church initiatives is that the visionary pastor gets excited about a direction and begins to take steps toward it but fails to bring the current leadership structure along for the ride. This frequently results in the emphasis being short-lived because it lacks the institutional support necessary for it to achieve longevity and thorough implementation. It would seem that with a bit of planning, the CFG model could and should be instituted with pastoral staff and lay leadership.

One final observation is that the CFG, while offering five months of focused training and experience, may come to an end without a clear next step. While the current plan enables participants to either continue with the group or step out to lead a new CFG, this plan may inadvertently overlook a few things. For instance, it is yet unproven if the CFG will take root. In light of this, there could be those who simply complete the process and plan neither to continue nor step into leadership. The question of what happens in this case remains open. Another potential suggestion might involve further developing another layer of discipleship similar to Wesley's bands. While Wesley loved the intensity of the bands, history seems to reveal that the class meeting was the most effective tool for Methodist renewal. However, that is not proof that further steps should not be taken

today. It may be that a well-designed band-like level of accountability is precisely the missing ingredient in the Nazarene pursuit of holiness. Only those who seek to engage this research will bear this out.

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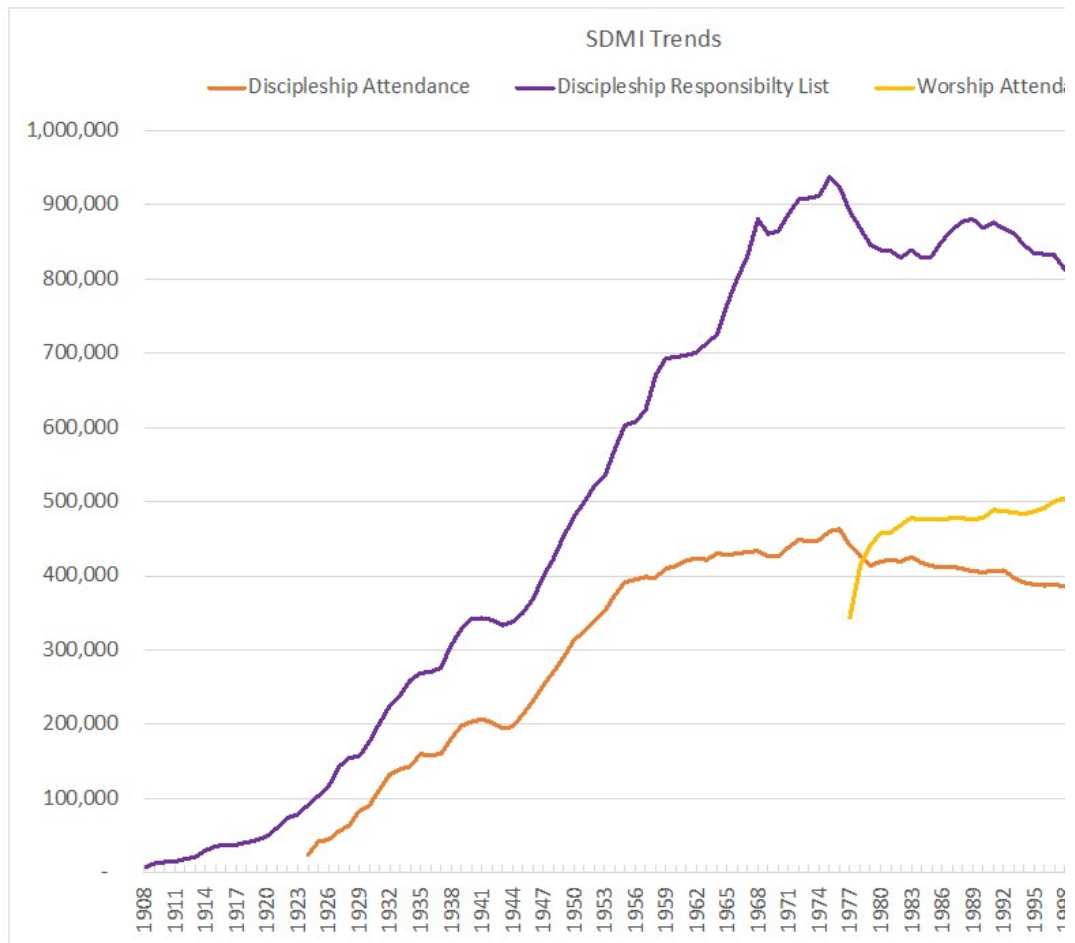
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Appendix 1. USA/Canada SDMI Trends



Appendix 2.
Sample CFG Covenant

Knowing that Jesus Christ died that I might live in loving relationship with God now and eternally, I pledge myself to live as his disciple, seeking to become more like him and witnessing to the hope found only in him. With the help of the Holy Spirit and in loving accountability to these fellow believers, I seek to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength; and my neighbor as myself.

I will worship each Sunday unless prevented.

I will receive the sacrament of Holy Communion each month.

I will pray each day, privately and with my family and friends.

I will read and study the scriptures each day.

I will return to Christ the first tenth of all I receive.

*I will spend four hours each month in service to my broader community in
Jesus' name.*

When I am aware of injustice to others, I will not remain silent.

I will obey the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

I will not sin against God or neighbor.

I will prayerfully care for my body and the world in which I live.

I hereby make this commitment, trusting in the grace of God to give me the will and the strength to keep this covenant.

Date: _____ Signed: _____

Appendix 3. Copyright

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Appendix 4. Dissertation Artifact

Dissertation Artifact: Sam Barber

“Watching Over One Another in Love: Covenant Formation Groups at Kansas City Central Church of the Nazarene”

Purpose

As those pursuing weight loss, physical fitness, or overcoming addiction have learned, accountability is the key to lasting change. Covenant Formation Groups (CFG) provide this accountability through members “watching over one another in love,” a phrase coined by John Wesley. Wesley was driven to see Christians truly become disciples of Jesus Christ and discovered that accountability was essential to this end. Wesley engendered life transformation through the early Methodist class meetings. CFG are a traditioned innovation of this 18th century Methodist hallmark. By meeting together around a mutually agreed upon covenant, the members of Covenant Formation Groups will experience real and lasting change in their own pursuit of Christlikeness.

Scope

The process for Covenant Formation Groups (CFG) is divided into eight weeks of training, followed by three months of experience. Once the five-month training and experience have concluded, members may choose to either remain in the group, or prepare for leadership of their own CFG, leading others through the process they have just completed.

Importantly, this curriculum will be presented as a special commitment. With the current familiarity with Zoom and other online meeting formats has revealed, there is no reason why a person could not commit to this training without absences. Wesley considered attendance at the class meeting to be mandatory. A whole-hearted commitment to the CFG will be required for admittance. Participants will be encouraged to attend in person

but if they are unable on a limited basis, electronic options are encouraged. If a person simply cannot commit to the five-month schedule, that person should be encouraged to wait until the schedule is more conducive.

The Eight-Week Training

Participants will be asked to meet for 75 minutes for each of the eight training sessions.

Each session is designed to inspire participants to move from wanting to pursue holiness but not knowing where to begin, to a Wesleyan-holiness methodology adapted from John Wesley himself. Wesley saw demonstrable life change and so will we as we learn and practice Covenant Discipleship.

The eight weeks are broken into the following sessions:

Week One – “Fish in Water: The American Church and Consumerism”

Week Two – “Forest and Trees: The American Church’s Discipleship Dilemma”

Week Three – “Back to the Future: John Wesley as a Way Forward”

Week Four – “Grace Enough: Holiness of Heart and Life and Responsible Grace”

Week Five – “From Here to There: John Wesley and the Means of Grace”

Week Six – “From Here to There: John Wesley and the Means of Grace” (Part 2)

Week Seven – “Watching Over One Another In Love: Accountability and Discipleship”

Week Eight – “Covenant Formation Groups: Building a Covenant Together”

Session Format:

Catching up with Each Other (relational connection): The sessions will begin with a few moments of casual interaction as participants catch up on the week’s activities. Learning to interact with fellow participants will strengthen our relational connections and enhance interaction. (5 minutes)

Praying for One Another (prayer): The Group Leader will then call the group together and lead in an opening time of prayer asking for God’s help in learning and growing in holiness. (3 minutes)

Getting to Know One Another (ice-breaker question): The Group Leader will ask a simple question designed to get the group interacting and to engage the general topic of the lesson. (5 minutes)

Discussion Questions: Each session will be supplemented by discussion questions designed to inspire peer-to-peer learning among the participants.

Application: The session will be closed with applications made to everyday life in a discussion format, followed by a closing prayer for God’s help in living into all that was learned.

Weekly Practice: At the close of each session, participants will be invited to engage in a weekly practice specifically designed to reinforce the training received.

Daily Devotional: Each day the participants will receive a daily devotional to be used for scripture reading, contemplation, and journaling along the lines of the received training. This daily interaction with God through the scriptures and prayer will give the Spirit of God the chance to remind participants each day of their commitment to grow in grace.

***Covenant Writing:** The final session will invite the group members to write a covenant upon which they mutually agree to be used as the format for the ensuing five-month CFG experience.

The Three-Month Experience:

Following the eight-week training, groups will create a mutually agreed upon covenant which will serve as the format for their ongoing meetings. The groups will simply work through the covenant each week building rapport, community, and loving accountability. This portion of the training will be introduced in more detail in week eight. The experiential Covenant Formation Group meetings will last one hour.

Week One
Fish in Water: The American Church in Consumerism

Key Takeaway: Consumerism is a kind of alternate religion in America that weakens our discipleship.

Learning Goals:

- Participants will understand the influence of consumerism on church participation.
- Participants will identify consumerism in their own lives.
- Participants will commit to practical steps which decrease the influence of consumerism in their lives and in church participation.

Catching up with One Another (5 minutes) – Group members should spend a few minutes interacting with one another in an effort to deepen relationships. While Christian community will require more than these five minutes each week, giving the first five minutes of the gathering to relational connection demonstrates it as a priority. Group members could be encouraged to spend time together outside of the weekly meetings as well.

Praying for One Another— (3 minutes) Led by the Group Leader

Getting to Know One Another : (3 minutes)

“If you had to divulge to this group one *thing* in your life that you tend to have too much of, what would it be and why?”

(Leaders Tip: Give the group a moment to think and then remind them to keep their responses brief.)

Today’s Session : “Fish in Water: The American Church in Consumerism”

(Group Leader—Share the following with the group. It is recommended to read the material a few times, making your own notes, and then present the material in a relatable format that avoids simply reading the text to the group.)

Where Are We Headed This Session? The formational influence of the church is being swallowed up in American consumerism resulting in a kind of cultural religion that lacks transformational power.

The Water We Swim In: No ideology is more embedded in the lives of Americans than consumerism. James K.A. Smith, Christian philosopher and educator, retells the opening parable of David Foster Wallace’s Kenyon College commencement address:

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says

“Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the heck is water?”

Consumerism is literally the water that Americans swim in. It is having an enormous impact on the church. Let’s see what we can learn.

The Participation Problem (5 minutes)

While well documented in the last decade by such research groups as The Barna Group, The American Culture and Faith Institute (ACFI), The Pew Research Center, and The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), a conversation with most any pastor or church leader will eventually result in a similar sentiment; the American church is struggling and many fear for its future. In the last 20 years church service attendance has declined by 21%. During that same period, small group participation has dropped by 28% and Sunday school participation has declined by 29%. The Pew Research Center recently reported that based on its research the number of people reporting no religious affiliation, the “*nones*” as they have come to be known, more than doubled between the years of 1990 and 2012, from 15% to 34%, leading James Emery White to conclude that, “America is not a Christian nation. This does not mean it is non-Christian or anti-Christian, simply that it has joined the ranks of many other Western countries and is *post-Christian*.” The church, without question, has a participation problem.

The Nazarene Church is not exempt from this decline in participation. Based on statistics provided by the USA Canada Regional Office of Sunday School and Discipleship Ministries (SDMI), discipleship attendance peaked in the mid-1970’s and has been on a downward trend since. The only exception to this trend line occurred in 2009 but the reversal was based on the inclusion of small groups in statistical reporting and even that was short-lived. Current SDMI attendance numbers are nearly identical to participation numbers from 1953.

While participation numbers may not be a completely reliable indicator of the overall discipleship of American evangelicals, if declining participation in the historic discipleship settings of the church is in any way indicative of the *value* placed on discipleship, it is clear something needs attention.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: What stands out to you from these statistics?

Ask: Does it seem like the church is in some trouble? If so why?

Ask: Are you familiar with the terms *post-Christian* and *post-modern*. What do you think they mean?

A Post-Modern Secular World View (5 minutes)

Research from the ACFI agrees with the results of the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) that America is post-Christian and has moved into a

post-modern and secular world view. What is most surprising about this reality is the rapid pace at which it has occurred. In 2005, two-thirds of American adults said that their religious faith was very important to them. Just *ten years* later that had slipped to only half. Clearly, orthodox Christianity is much less popular in America today than it was just one decade ago.

James White quotes a Barna Group survey in which respondents were asked to indicate their reaction to 15 measurements of their faith and participation in religious activities.

To be deemed “post-Christian,” the person had to meet 60 percent or more of the fifteen factors. To be deemed “highly post-Christian,” the person had to meet at least 80 percent (twelve or more) of the factors. Examining these fifteen measures of non-religiosity, they found that 37 percent of Americans are generally post-Christian, and one in four (25 percent) are highly post-Christian.

It is tempting to write these findings off as pertaining largely to those outside the church, indeed the study was done to try and discover the origins of the “nones,” however, Barna points out that while on religious matters born-again Americans may participate at a higher rate, when measuring lifestyle behaviors “...the research consistently reveals little discernible difference in the core behaviors and lifestyle attitudes and values of born-again Christians when compared to other Americans.”

All of this seems to indicate that the cultural trends in America today are pervasive not only for the average American but also for those who identify as Christian and evangelical. Living in a post-Christian America is making the role of church leadership evermore challenging and is undercutting the efforts of the church for the time and attention of participants in the church’s discipleship efforts.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: What evidence do you see of America as post-Christian?

Ask: Why do you think the cultural trend of the “nones” has grown so quickly?

Ask: Can you share any instances when you have seen this in the church?

The Pull of Consumerism (7 minutes)

In the space created by post-Christendom, an alternative “religion” has taken root, the religion of consumerism. “Consumerism is the idea that increasing consumption of goods and services purchased in the market is always a desirable goal and that a person's wellbeing and happiness depends fundamentally on obtaining consumer goods and material possessions.” John De Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor, in their best-selling book, *Affluenza: How Overconsumption is Killing Us-and How to Fight Back*, see consumerism almost

like a pathology. “A powerful virus has infected American society, threatening our wallets, our friendships, our families, our communities, and our environment. We call the virus affluenza.”

In our view, the affluenza epidemic is rooted in the obsessive, *almost religious* quest for economic expansion that has become the core principle of what is called the American dream. It’s rooted in the fact that our supreme measure of national progress is that quarterly ring of the cash register we call the gross domestic product. It’s rooted in the idea that every generation will be materially wealthier than its predecessor and that, somehow, each of us can pursue that single-minded end without damaging the countless other things we hold dear.

If one questions the qualification of consumerism as religion, look again at consumerism’s definition. Consumerism says that a person’s *wellbeing and happiness* depend upon the consumption of goods and services—a message clearly at odds with the scriptures. Note just these few examples:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Note this disturbing comparison:

Since World War II, Americans have been engaged in an unprecedented consumer spending binge. We now spend 71 percent of our \$15 trillion economy on consumer goods...in the Age of Affluenza (as we believe the century following World War II will eventually be called), shopping centers have supplanted churches as a symbol of cultural values. In fact, 70 percent of us visit malls each week, more than attend houses of worship.

Jesus came to offer life abundant to be sure, but Americans appear to prefer the alternate religion of consumerism as their means to the abundant life.

Victor Lebow, in 1955, wrote what has become the touchstone for the consumerist mindset and the apparent template for the economic ideals of America. Consider his “religious” language and also consider that this philosophy has had decades to permeate the American culture aided by the powers of marketing and technology.

Our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption

our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into *rituals*, *that we seek our spiritual satisfactions*, our ego satisfactions, in consumption. The measure of social status, of social acceptance, of prestige, is now to be found in our consumptive patterns. *The very meaning and significance of our lives today expressed in consumptive terms*. The greater the pressures upon the individual to conform to safe and accepted social standards, the more does he tend to express his aspirations and his individuality in terms of what he wears, drives, eats—his home, his car, his pattern of food serving, his hobbies.

The challenge is clear. The practice of consumers in a consumeristic culture is an alternate religion with extensive impact.

Consumerism ingrained in a consumer culture is literally the water that Americans swim in and evangelical church leaders would do well to realize it.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: What stood out to you from this discussion of consumerism?

Ask: How do you see this played out in America?

Ask: How pervasive is this in the church? Why did you answer as you did?

The Johnson County Setting (5 minutes)

Johnson County, Kansas, is comfortably middle-class suburban America. It is also the home of Central Church. It is a world where people live in nice homes, drive nice cars, and are well educated. Kansans in Johnson County have a median annual income of \$86,746, which is 40% more than the median annual income of \$61,937 across the entire United States. Only 5.3% of Johnson County falls below the poverty line. The average in the United States is 13.1%. The jobs generating this level of income are largely management, office and administrative, and sales related—classically “white collar” jobs. Ninety-five percent of Johnson County’s inhabitants have a high school degree or more with 55% of them holding bachelor’s degrees. Ninety-five percent of the homes have computers and 91% use broadband internet. The median property value is 1.2 times higher than the national average and 68% of its residents own their homes. When they leave home, Johnson County residents have an average of two cars from which to choose.

The cities are dotted with picturesque metro-parks and the boutique coffee shops are filled with upwardly mobile people using smartphones, laptops, and tablets and sipping six-dollar coffee beverages. While the culture seems pleasant and passive, it is, in fact, quite powerful. Like most of America, this is a culture that champions wealth, power, and status. It is not so far removed from the lyrics of the rock band Queen, “I want it all, and I want it now.” Pressure to fit in to cultural norms is subtle but strong and outsiders seem to stand out immediately, should they wander into this enclave of suburban middle America. While it may

wear the garb of the middle class, this culture's penchant for self-sufficiency traces its origin back to the Garden of Eden. Central Church seems common to other churches of its size in America, if not in actual setting, at least in aspiration. *Affluenza* offers a summary of America that fits Johnson County Kansans like a glove.

America's 114 million households—the authors among them—contain and consume more stuff than all other households throughout history, put together. Behind closed doors, we churn through manufactured goods and piped-in entertainment as if life were a stuff-eating contest. Despite tangible indications of indigestions, we keep consuming, partly because we're convinced it's normal. Writes the columnist Ellen Goodman, "Normal is getting dressed in clothes that you buy for work, driving through traffic in a car that you are still paying for, in order to get to the job that you need so you can pay for the clothes, car, and the house that you leave empty all day in order to afford to live in it."

All of this to say that while there are no placards reading, "First Church of Consumption," or "Consumerism Assembly," the grip of consumerism on the souls of Johnson County Kansans is strong.

George Barna summarizes the situation when he writes:

When all the smoke and mirrors are removed from the discussion most churchgoing people in America have no idea what the objectives of their religious pursuits are other than to be a better person, to believe in the existence and goodness of Jesus Christ, to keep God happy, and to be a good church member. When pushed to describe in practical terms what these things mean and how they can best accomplish these objectives, alarmingly few people possess viable answers and almost nobody has a plan. They assume that attending church regularly, praying and reading the Bible occasionally, and completing a church program or two designed to facilitate spiritual maturity will do the job.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: How have you seen consumerism on display in and around the church?

Ask: Where do you see the symptoms of *Affluenza* in your neighborhood? Do you see these symptoms in yourself?

Ask: Why do you think so few Christians have a hunger for pursuing Christlikeness?

The Pastoral Problem (5 minutes)

Most alarming might be, however, Barna's insistence that church leaders seem satisfied with their level of discipleship. "Surveys among pastors revealed them to be quite pleased with the spiritual condition of their congregants and planning to continue on the same course of action to keep producing the same

outcomes they have been generating.”

Once again, the Nazarene church is not immune to this cultural phenomenon. The statistics on worship and discipleship provided by the Global Ministry Center of the Church of the Nazarene reveal that the discipleship arm of the local church, Sunday School, showed a steady increase in both participation and emphasis from the church’s inception in 1908 until the mid-1970’s. Circa 1977 two intriguing things happened: First, the church began to emphasize and track Sunday morning worship attendance; Second, Sunday School attendance shows a marked decrease in both emphasis and attendance. In fact, the Sunday School has never recovered.

These statistics seem to indicate that once the church became interested in Sunday morning worship attendance, its emphasis on discipleship began to wane. Based on the pervasive nature of America’s alternate religion, consumerism, and consumerism’s emphasis on “bigger and better,” it appears likely that the Nazarene’s got swept up in a focus on church health as measured in buildings, worship attendance, and property while its historic emphasis on discipleship suffered. While lamentable, it is not surprising since 1977 was right in the middle of the Church Growth Movement in the United States, itself an expression of church born of a consumerist mindset. “In the 1970s and 1980s, American evangelicals coupled their love for evangelism and missions with a new pragmatism steeped in marketing strategies. The result was a new emphasis on consumer-oriented church growth.” What remains is a church now suffering decline in both worship and discipleship attendance. All of this seems similar to a farmer emphasizing barn building and machinery acquisition but failing to cultivate a crop. The wrong emphasis is leading. More crops necessitate barns, not the other way around. The church needs to refocus on making disciples as the means to healthy and lasting church growth.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: What can churches like Kansas City Central do in light of all of this?

Ask: How do we become aware of the “water we swim in,” and what steps can we take to reduce the impact of consumerism on the church?

Weekly Practice: (10 minutes) There are two tasks for us this week in our weekly practice.

1. *Give*- Consider, right now, what you will give and to whom over the next seven days to help break the hold of “stuff” on you.
2. *Simplify*- Clean out the junk drawer. Take a load of clothes to Good Will.

Application: What do you think taking part in this practice may teach you this week? Have several members share to encourage the group.

Daily Devotions: Remind the participants of the daily devotions offered on

Central Church's social media so that they can reinforce what they are learning each day.

Prayer: Offer prayers for strength and focus for the group. Offer prayers for any needs of which the group is aware.

Dismiss within the 75 minute window to preserve the trust that these meetings will start and end on time. This discipline will help to keep morale high and participation consistent.

Daily Devotions

Monday: Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." -Hebrews 13:5, ESV

Why is contentment so difficult these days? Do you notice the continual onslaught of messages that tell us that we need more, better, newer? If we contrast this message with the person of Jesus, what do we find? We follow a Savior who had no place to lay his head yet demonstrated full contentment. Jesus reminds us that life is more than the accumulation of stuff. Let's find our contentment in him.

Tuesday: And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." -Luke 12:15, ESV

What is covetousness? An inordinate desire for someone else's possessions. Jesus warns us against this. It's like an addiction in many ways. The more I have, the more I want. Jesus teaches us that life is more than acquisition and consumption. Where could you practice generosity, the opposite of covetousness today?

Wednesday: For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. -I John 2:16, ESV

John reminds the church that to love the things of the world is to ultimately reject the Father. How can we learn to live in the world and participate in the economy without getting swept up into an unhealthy love of the things of the world? One important alternative is to learn to give generously. How is that going for you?

Thursday: Sell your possessions and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. -Luke 12: 33-34, ESV

Where is your greatest treasure? Does it compete with the Lordship of Christ in your life? Jesus teaches us here that if we are not diligent, our possessions can actually possess us! Do you have anything that has gotten too strong a hold on your heart? Confess that to Jesus and ask for his strength today.

Friday: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. -Matthew 6:24, ESV

Ever stand on a dock with one foot and in a canoe with the other foot? You know the danger, right? Chances are that eventually calamity will strike and you’ll be all wet. We cannot divide our allegiances between God and money. They are competing for lordship in our lives. Choose Jesus who offers abundant life and let Jesus determine what things he entrusts you to steward.

Saturday: Review

Take a few moments today and think back over this week’s devotions. Where did God speak? What are you learning? What changes have you made? Thank God for his faithfulness and prepare your heart for worship tomorrow.

Week Two

Forest and Trees: The American Church's Discipleship Dilemma

Key Takeaway: The church needs to recover a biblical, historical, and Wesleyan model of discipleship.

Learning Goals:

- Participants will learn the key moments in the history of discipleship following Jesus' earthly ministry.
- Participants will sense the importance of engaging in the ministry of discipleship in response to God's call.
- Participants will see the importance of John Wesley for the cause of discipleship renewal.

Catching Up with One Another – (5 minutes) This week, in addition to encouraging participants to spend a few minutes interacting with one another, have everyone write their name on a small piece of paper and place it in a basket. One by one have the members choose a name to be their prayer partner for the week. Each person should share their name with the group and ask the person they have chosen if there is any specific prayer request for the week.

Praying for One Another— (3 minutes) Led by the Group Leader

Getting to Know One Another: (3 minutes)

“What does the phrase, ‘You can’t see the forest for the trees,’ mean? Please share an instance in your life when this was true of you.”

(Leaders Tip: Give the group a moment to think and then remind them to keep their responses brief.)

Today's Session: “Forest and Trees: The American Church's Discipleship Dilemma”

(Group Leader—Share the following with the group. It is recommended to read the material a few times, making your own notes, and then present the material in a relatable format that avoids simply reading the text to the group.)

Where are We Headed This Session? This session will trace the history of the importance of making disciples from Jesus' Great Commission through to the Pietists. Never fear, we'll only hopscotch across history, but we'll learn a lot along the way, noting times of effectiveness and ineffectiveness.

Forest and Trees: The church does a lot of really amazing things. In fact, most churches are quite busy doing good. What is happening, however, is that the

church gets so busy doing good things that we lose sight of the gospel call to make disciples. We must be careful *not to miss the forest for the trees*. Perhaps you've heard this commentary on the church today.

Jesus said that we should make disciples and that he would build the church. Sadly, the church has gotten this the other way around. We've gotten so busy focusing on Jesus' part, we've forgotten our part.

Let's spend some time looking back at what the scriptures and church history have to say about discipleship.

I. The Gospel (7 minutes)

What is at stake in the Church of the Nazarene and other churches like it, is not merely the fate of the church in America, but more importantly the purposes of God in the world. When Jesus quoted Luke 61:1-2, in reference to himself in the synagogue in Nazareth, he was invoking the dramatic reversal of the forces of darkness that had been trumpeted in the Old Testament prophets. Jesus said:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

The significance of this moment is that Jesus declared he would not only lead this reversal but would himself embody it. Jesus was announcing the inbreaking of a new kingdom, one built not on power and wealth, but one built on sacrifice and love. Jesus began to teach his disciples to seek the fulfillment of this kingdom even as they prayed saying, 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'

Jesus' life and teachings clearly point to this kingdom's arrival and advancement, but Christians today look around to acknowledge that what was begun over 2,000 years ago is yet to be completed. Indeed, the preceding discussion of the church's relative ineffectiveness and the seeming relentless march of consumerism can be disheartening. It is at this point that the church's ineffectiveness at producing disciples comes to the fore.

The Biblical narrative declares that God has chosen to entrust the future of his kingdom into the hands of ordinary believers. What an overwhelming reality! In fact, many Christians today are so steeped in the busyness of church activity that the realities of this mission escape their attention. For those who are aware of God's unfolding work, they struggle to imagine themselves adequate to the task of being a colleague with God. David Lowes Watson has authored numerous books and articles linking the call of Christ to make disciples with the work of Wesley

and the Methodists. He writes:

If Christians are to understand their role, therefore, and undertake their task with integrity, they must not evade the mysteries of God's salvation; nor must they try to resolve them. Christians must rather seek to join with the risen Christ *in the midst* of the mysteries, proclaiming the hope of the gospel. They must work faithfully in the world, waiting expectantly for God's redemption to be fulfilled, and wrestling with the tensions of a message which points to the future. To do all of this, they must be centered on Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit; and they must be formed into faithful, obedient disciples. Nothing less will suffice.

Discipleship, therefore, is the answer to the problem. Without it, the church loses sight of the reason for which Jesus came and the world is deprived of the *good news*. Such a cause is too important to be gobbled up by consumerism or any other force.

Jesus very clearly called disciples and handed that call over to the church in Matthew 28:19.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

While the church has had a mixed track record of faithfulness to both this call and commission, David Lowes Watson contends:

Yet there have always been those who have responded to the Jewish carpenter with integrity. Not only have their spiritual gifts been much in evidence, but their faithfulness and obedience to the teachings of Jesus have provided us with important role models for Christian discipleship...The early Methodist revival was such a time...

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Why do you think that even though Jesus was very clear in the Great Commission, that Christians struggle to actually fulfill it?

Ask: What impact should the call to make disciples have on today's busy congregations?

Ask: What can a Christian do to overcome her/his feelings of inadequacy in pursuing the Great Commission of Jesus?

II. Discipleship: Jesus' Plan for the Church (5 minutes)

Following his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus gathered with his disciples and prepared them for his departure. Their minds must have raced as

Jesus commissioned them to make disciples. Certainly, they were aware of their own struggles to understand and obey Jesus. Even the gift of the baptism of the Spirit that Jesus promised them must have seemed unclear to them in that moment. Jesus then ascended and they were left staring intently into the sky waiting for what would happen next. The assurance of the angels prompted them to return to Jerusalem and tend to the task of finding a replacement for Judas, but the making of disciples remained a mystery.

Only after receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, did this disciple-making venture begin to take shape. God moved the hearts of people and their repentance in massive numbers required the disciples ultimately, to organize these new believers into groups for instruction and encouragement. The preaching of the freshly Spirit-filled disciples revealed a new understanding of their role in the work that Jesus had been doing. Peter was suddenly able to fit the pieces of the redemption story together weaving in the prophets, the life and teachings of Jesus, the divine purposes of the crucifixion and resurrection, and the exaltation of Jesus as God's Messiah.

Acts 2:42 may reveal the earliest expression of what would come to be known as discipleship as the believers gathered together for teaching, fellowship, sacrament, and prayer. This loving accountability was blessed by God and the church was born--a church built on the foundation of discipleship.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Why do you think the Holy Spirit made such a difference in the disciple-making ability of Jesus' followers?

Ask: What impact do you think the Holy Spirit might have on the church today with regard to making disciples?

Ask: Have you ever experienced the kind of spiritual intimacy the early Christians displayed in Acts 2:42? If so, please describe it for the group.

III. Seasons of Effectiveness and Ineffectiveness (5 minutes)

The Book of Acts

The church in the book of Acts was a fledgling movement trying to live into the teachings of its founder. Despite opposition from the religious establishment, the Spirit was bringing new life through dramatic conversions and the young church grew rapidly. The church lived with a sense of expectation as God moved. Not even persecution could quell the expansion of the movement.

The Epistles

The epistles of Paul reveal that this movement, eventually called Christianity, was filled with seasons of effectiveness and ineffectiveness as the early church lived into Jesus' commission. Paul's letters are often a blend of rejoicing, thankfulness, and abrupt correctives. Nevertheless, the missionary journeys of Paul perpetuated and nurtured the Great Commission as Jesus had

said, "...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Early Church History

Early church history depicts a church organizing and struggling to distill its doctrine. The impact of Roman Emperor Constantine's edict in 325 A.D. permitted legal expansion of the church in the Roman Empire, but also diluted its message by confusing conversion and citizenship. The monastic movement was an effort to recapture the seriousness of Christ's call to follow but left the rank-and-file believer largely untouched. The period of the "dark ages" brought about by the church's failure to imitate Christ and its coziness with power led ultimately to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century.

(Allow 3 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Between the extremes of state religion where everyone is a Christian and monasticism where religion seems out of the reach of the non-cleric, what do you think discipleship offers?

The Puritans, Pietists, and Moravians (7 minutes)

Certainly, other instances of effectiveness and ineffectiveness in the pursuit of Jesus' commission throughout church history could be noted, but the influence of the Puritans, Pietists, and the Moravians had a direct and positive influence on John Wesley and the Methodists. Samuel Wesley, John's father, had a penchant for technical theology and was a strong influence on both John and Charles. However, it was Suzanna Wesley, John's mother, whose Puritan roots were taught to John and his siblings through her careful discipleship of the Wesley children. Suzanna's father instilled in her the Puritan ideals intended to purify the Anglican Church and she, in turn, passed them on to the Wesley children. While preaching, a Puritan point of emphasis, was Samuel's role, Suzanna drilled into her children the Puritan sensibility that, "...God was so important that halfway measures were not possible: Christianity demanded the whole of personal and social life." Suzanna's course of discipleship included prayer, Bible study, catechizing, and detailed personal instruction in the Christian faith. Each evening she would take one or two of the children aside for an in-depth discussion of their spiritual development. These classic Puritan sensibilities were embodied in Suzanna and she firmly imprinted young John with the importance of whole-life surrender to the purposes of God. Suzanna's influence took root. Wesley would later refer to the pastors and teachers of the Reformed churches "...as the proper successors of those who had delivered through all generations the faith once delivered to the saints."

The German Pietists also represent a period of faithful pursuit of God and God's purposes on earth. Philip Jacob Spener saw the Lutheran church as passive and indifferent to the principles of Christ's kingdom. Spener advocated for self-examination, repentance, and conversion as a means to bring renewal to the church. Additionally, Spener created a program of church reform, the *collegia*

pietatis, literally “schools of piety” in Latin. These semi-weekly group gatherings were designed to wed religious experience to practical piety by faithfully practicing prayer, Bible study, and an early expression of Sunday School. These efforts to educate and develop the laity gained momentum and formed the foundation of the German Pietist movement.

The German Pietist movement spread to other continents, but it was through a specific group of pietists known as the Moravians, that John Wesley discovered another expression of faithful Christlikeness. “The movement emphasized personal conversion with the expectation of a renewed life...(t)he Pietists insisted on congruence between one’s profession and one’s behavior; Christianity was a life to be lived, not just a mental faith.” Banished from their home country and developing outposts in both England and the colonies, the Moravians practiced a simple lifestyle and a sincere faith. They fostered a courageous trust in God and believed strongly in a personal assurance of faith in Christ. For the Moravians, “...individuals were granted salvation by God instantaneously, i.e., ‘born again,’ and could be assured of this divine favor by the subjective experience they called ‘the witness of the spirit.’” Indeed it was at a Moravian group meeting on Aldersgate Street in London that John Wesley experienced for himself the assurance of salvation he had first seen in the Moravians.

This serious-minded pursuit of Christlikeness has indeed found those who would take it up throughout history, none more significant than John Wesley and the Methodists.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: What did Suzanna Wesley, the German Pietists, and the Moravians all share in common?

Ask: What does your answer above imply for more current efforts at discipleship?

Weekly Practice: (10 minutes) The periods of faithfulness in discipleship history are all born from people who heard and acted on the voice of the Spirit. The Apostle Paul, Suzanna Wesley, the Moravians, and eventually John Wesley were able to discern God’s direction and take action.

This week’s practice is to carve out 10 minutes to listen for God to speak. Here is how to accomplish this:

1. Find a solitary place, not just quiet, alone.
2. Turn off all electronic devices to lessen distractions.
3. Say the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) quietly, pausing for 10 seconds after each phrase.
4. Pay attention to your thoughts, if they wander, come back to the prayer it will orient you.

5. Listen as you pray and after you pray.
 6. Remember or jot down what you think God was saying in these moments and come prepared to share about them next week.
- (Note: If you sincerely try and don't feel like God said anything, that's OK. We'll talk about that when we gather again.)

Application: What do you think taking part in this practice may teach you this week? Have several members share to encourage the group.

Daily Devotions: Remind the participants of the daily devotions offered on Central Church's social media so that they can reinforce what they are learning each day.

Prayer: Offer prayers for strength and focus for the group. Offer prayers for any needs of which the group is aware.

Dismiss within the 75 minute window to preserve the trust that these meetings will start and end on time. This discipline will help to keep morale high and participation consistent.

Daily Devotions

Monday: "Come, follow me", Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." -Matthew 4:19, NIV

Don't miss this progression: Follow first, learn discipleship in the process. When Jesus spoke, those who received him left what they were doing and learned by spending time with Jesus. There is no discipleship without believers who learn to spend time listening and learning from Jesus. If you're reading this, you're on the right track. Keep going!

Tuesday: And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. -2 Timothy 2:2, NIV

If you carefully consider it, this is how you received the truth of Jesus. Someone in your circle of influence shared their faith with you. They had received it from someone else. This is God's plan. There are many ways to share our faith, but we must actually do it. We must learn to love those around us enough to tell them the reason for the hope we have. Let's not be the ones who break the legacy of sharing our faith.

Wednesday: To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." -John 8: 31-32, NIV

A form of discipleship happens in many ways. I have become a Chiefs fan because my

friends love the Chiefs, talk about the Chiefs, and took me to see a Chiefs' game. I came away wanting more. But Christian discipleship is all about Jesus. Jesus says that his teaching, his truth is really the pathway to life as God intended it. How well do we know Jesus? Do we talk about him? Are we prepared to introduce a good friend to him?

Thursday: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." -John 13: 34-35, NIV

How did Jesus love us? Jesus loved us unconditionally and sacrificially. How, then, are we to love? In the same way. Two things seem crucially important: First, I cannot love like this without the infilling of God's Spirit. Second, it is Christ's love in us that defines us as disciples. We don't have to have all the answers, but we do have to love as Jesus loved. May God grant us a clear call to the life of a disciple.

Friday: As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. -Matthew 9:9, NIV

Matthew was no one's first choice for a disciple of Jesus, but Jesus saw something in him and invited him to follow. Maybe others wouldn't look at us as good candidates for disciples, either. I think what matters most is what Jesus thinks. May God help us never to exclude anyone from the invitation to follow Jesus. Jesus calls the unlikely because he sees what we cannot. Who do you know that needs Jesus? What are you prepared to do about that?

Saturday: Review

Take a few moments today and think back over this week's devotions. Where did God speak? What are you learning? What changes have you made? Thank God for his faithfulness and prepare your heart for worship tomorrow.

Week Three

Back to the Future: John Wesley as a Way Forward

Key Takeaway: John Wesley's efforts in discipleship and emphasis on holiness reformed 18th century England and mark a path for discipleship renewal in the Church of the Nazarene.

Learning Goals:

- Participants will hear the call to evangelism and discipleship in the post-modern church.
- Participants will understand the importance of the relational element in discipleship.
- Participants will learn to identify the roots of Wesley's teaching in Nazarene heritage.

Catching Up with One Another – (5 minutes) This week, have each group member share an update on the prayer request they shared with their prayer partner last week. The responses should be brief so that everyone has a chance to offer an update in an unhurried manner. This will enable the group to celebrate the work of the Lord together as the participants report on God's faithfulness.

Next, have each member indicate on a scale of one to five (one being the least) how well they think they did in praying for their prayer partner this week. This will introduce the importance of vulnerability and accountability that will be so vital later in the experience portion of this Community Formation Group.

Praying for One Another – (3 minutes) Led by the Group Leader

Getting to Know One Another: (3 minutes)

“If it were possible for you to have dinner with any historical figure, who would it be and why?”

(Leaders Tip: Give the group a moment to think and then remind them to keep their responses brief.)

Today's Session: “Back to the Future: John Wesley as a Way Forward”

(Group Leader—Share the following with the group. It is recommended to read the material a few times, making your own notes, and then present the material in a relatable format that avoids simply reading the text to the group.)

Where Are We Headed This Session? Church history reveals many faithful leaders, but few prove as faithful and effective in creating truly transformed disciples as John Wesley. What follows provides the rationale for looking back to

John Wesley and the early Methodists as the way forward for the church today.

I. Wesley the Influencer (5 minutes)

Wesley scholars are in broad agreement that 18th century Methodism represents a watershed not only in serious-minded discipleship and ecclesiastical renewal, but also in the preservation of the peace and people of England. John Wesley believed that the Church of England had abdicated its responsibility to uphold the cause of making Christlike disciples and the result was a nation far from God. The England of his day was rife with social ills; unnecessary wars, the slave trade, uncharitable conversation, alcoholism, and lifestyles that did not reflect the love of God and neighbor. Further, the citizens of Wesley's England had become preoccupied with the accumulation of riches coupled with a lack of generosity to the poor. Wesley loved the Church of England that birthed him but saw its relative disinterest in pursuing holiness of heart and life. Who could have predicted that within his lifetime, John Wesley's influence would play a part in the crumbling class system and reform of many of the nation's social ills? Further, that this re-ordering would not come with the bloodshed of the French Revolution, but would rather be quiet, orderly, and grounded in spiritual renewal led by Anglican revivalists and their lay assistants.

The nation was shaken to its core but not by the footfalls of marching troops, rather by the power of a spiritual awakening. "Early in the nineteenth century, historians began to weigh the effect Methodism had on the course of England's destiny. Wesley was acknowledged to be the guiding spirit of the age, much as Voltaire had been during the same period in France." While scholars continue to debate this specific claim, there is general agreement that the "...transformation of English society was largely due to the impact of Wesley and the movement he spawned."

While the situations of 18th century England and 21st century America appear vastly different, at least one thing appears to connect them. Both situations reveal a church with lackluster discipleship impact. What the early Methodists were able to do in their situation provides a helpful study for Nazarene's and other evangelical churches in this century.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: In your own words, why do you think John Wesley was so influential in 18th century England?

Ask: Why do you think John Wesley's efforts in discipling led to such sweeping reforms in his day?

Ask: Based on what you've been learning in these sessions, what attitudes or circumstances in our culture reveal the church's lack of emphasis on discipleship?

II. Wesley the Evangelist (5 minutes)

The core of this renewal was grounded in the spiritual awakening of those who remained “asleep” in their apathy toward God. John Wesley believed that while humans were created in the image of God, sin entered into human existence through the fall of Adam and Eve resulting in a nature that was turned inward toward self. While the resultant condition may or may not look like the depths of sin, every person was utterly unable to bring about her/his own salvation. Through prevenient grace God works to awaken a person to the offer of salvation and a new beginning.

To this end, Wesley, especially in the earliest days of the Methodist revival, preached strong sermons designed to challenge his hearers to come to grips with their spiritual slumber. He was convinced that most people were not sufficiently conscious of their need for awakening. Through a variety of means, they had resisted the overtures of God’s prevenient grace and any potential change would require awakening to this need as, “none will come to the Physician but that are sick and are thoroughly sensible to it.” In addition to strong preaching, Wesley also believed that tragedies, natural disasters, conversations, and direct conviction by the Holy Spirit were also means to awakening. Regardless of the means, however, there could be no salvation without first an awakening. In *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, Wesley writes to the Reverend Mr. Perronet of the response to his preaching:

Many of those who heard this began to cry out that we brought “strange things to their ears;’ that this was doctrine which they never heard before, or at least never regarded. They “searched the scriptures, whether these things were so,” and acknowledged “the truth as it is in Jesus.” Their hearts also were influenced as well as their understandings, and they determined to follow “Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

Preaching for awakenings in the spirit of Wesley has fallen out of vogue in post-modern America. Pastors and churches have fallen victim to what Juan Luis Segundo has called “The General Rule of Pastoral Prudence.” Segundo defines this as “seeking to retain the maximum number of members by requiring the minimum in obligations.” Perhaps awakenings may be initiated in creative ways beyond fiery preaching alone, but the awareness of the need for God has not changed from Wesley's century to now.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: What, in your opinion, causes people to be “asleep” with regard to their spiritual lives?

Ask: Again, in your opinion, what kinds of things does God use to wake people up from their spiritual slumber?

Ask: What do you think of The General Rule of Pastoral Prudence?

III. Wesley the Disciple-Maker (5 minutes)

While Wesley advocated for the awakening of those who showed apathy

toward the things of God, the awakening was, to speak metaphorically, the starting line and not the finish line. John Wesley understood that the nature of humanity would require more than simply grief over the sin condition or a “moment” of salvation. Sin was deeply ingrained in the human condition and the process of overcoming it would require growth in grace.

(T)here is nothing more certain than that the Holy Spirit will not purify our nature, unless we carefully attend to his motions, which are lost upon us while, in the Prophet's language, we “scatter away our time,”—while we squander away our thoughts upon unnecessary things, and leave our spiritual improvement, the one thing needful, quite unthought of and neglected.

To this end Wesley drew from his early homelife under the careful tutelage of his mother, the education he received both as student and tutor, and his leadership of the famed “Oxford Holy Club,” to gather together those who experienced an “awakening” through his preaching into smaller groups. This group concept would mature over time, but each development had in common a kind of accountable discipleship that enabled the participants to spur one another on toward holiness of heart and life. Again, in correspondence with Rev. Perronet:

Thus arose, without any previous design on either side, what was afterwards called *A Society*... They wanted to “flee the wrath to come,” and to assist each other in so doing. They therefore united themselves “in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they might help each other to work out their salvation.”

The combination of John Wesley's zeal for the souls of his countrymen and his remarkable ability to create relational connections through “watching over one another in love,” made early Methodism the most important discipleship movement since the Acts church and foundational to the renewal of the church today.

Clearly churches in post-modern America have seen the benefit of connecting believers in relational settings. Unfortunately, these connections do not go quite far enough in engendering lasting spiritual impact on the participants. Too often the groups are centered only around the affinities of the members or provide only a relational connection with little expectation for real transformation. Wesley and the Methodists modeled a different approach; one that has much to teach American church leaders.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: In what ways do Americans tend to scatter away their time?

Ask: In addition to Wesley's groups, where in current society do we see the power of groups holding one another accountable? In your opinion, is there

church very good at this?

Ask: What was unique about Wesley's small groups compared to most small groups in churches today?

IV. Nazarene Roots in Wesley (5 minutes)

A final reason to look back at Wesley's Methodists as a way forward today is that the Church of the Nazarene claims Wesley and Methodism in its heritage.

The Historical Statement in the Manual of the Church of the Nazarene states:

Our Christian heritage was mediated through the 16th-century English Reformation and 18th-century Wesleyan revival. Through the preaching of John and Charles Wesley, people throughout England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales turned from sin and were empowered for Christian service.

This revival was characterized by lay preaching, testimony, discipline, and circles of earnest disciples known as "societies," "classes," and "bands."

The Wesleyan revival's theological landmarks were: justification by grace through faith; sanctification, or Christian perfection, likewise by grace through faith; and the witness of the Spirit to the assurance of grace. John Wesley's distinctive contributions included an emphasis on entire sanctification as God's gracious provision for the Christian life.

The ongoing debate between those within the Church of the Nazarene who identify more with the American Holiness Movement of the 19th century and those who identify more with the Wesleyan Revival of 18th century England continues with plenty of energy on both sides. While the American Holiness advocates tend to emphasize the pulpit and the altar, those advocating for a stronger link to the Wesleyan Revival point to the importance of the liturgy and the sacraments. The relative merits of each argument notwithstanding, many warm-hearted Nazarenes argue for an approach that, out of love for one another, makes room in Nazarene churches for the best of both movements. This is an admirable and indeed holiness mindset, however, this discussion; and many other inter-denominational squabbles, draws the church's attention away from a much larger point. The Church of the Nazarene's stated mission is, "To Make Christlike Disciples in the Nations." Based on the statistics offered in Lesson One that show the Nazarenes' waning discipleship impact in the United States and Canada, it seems that the church should lay aside debates like this and return to its stated mission to make Christlike disciples in the nations. Those, like Wesley and the Methodists, who have done so throughout history shine as bright lights of faithfulness to the scriptural call of the Lord Jesus.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: In what places do you see John Wesley's influence preserved in your local church?

Ask: What is your chief interest in discipleship? In brief, why are you a part of this training?

Ask: Do you think a "discipleship first" emphasis is the way forward for the

church or do you see something else as a matter of first priority? If so, what is it?

Weekly Practice: (10 minutes) Today we share our feedback from last week's weekly practice of 10 minutes of solitude.

1. What did you learn about yourself in this attempt at solitude?
2. What did you learn about your environment in this practice?
3. What are the implications for your efforts at discipleship in light of this?

For this week: John Wesley was a firm believer in fasting as a way to break the bonds that food or other things may have on the believer. This week fast one part of your life that tempts you to "scatter away" your time. For me, it probably involves checking the sports on my ESPN app. What is it for you? Examples might include: abstaining from social media, fasting one meal per day, or giving up television two evenings per week.

Daily Devotions: Remind the participants of the daily devotions offered on Central Church's social media so that they can reinforce what they are learning each day.

Prayer: Offer prayers for strength and focus for the group. Offer prayers for any needs of which the group is aware.

Dismiss within the 75 minute window to preserve the trust that these meetings will start and end on time. This discipline will help to keep morale high and participation consistent.

Daily Devotions

Monday: Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. -Colossians 4:5-6, NIV

This is a call to being fully present in our lives. There is wisdom in our intentionally Christian behaviors, especially toward those who do not profess Christ. This grace-seasoned living is an initial overture in discipleship. The kindness of Christ is winsome. Let's be careful to practice it every day.

Tuesday: Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. -James 4:14, NIV

Self-sufficiency is a constant threat to our spiritual growth. A practiced reliance upon God is essential for the kind of surrender that the Spirit uses. This verse is difficult for most Americans as it reminds us of the transience of our lives on earth. However, we must come to grips with our mortality if we hope to impact eternity.

Wednesday: Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. -Psalm 90:12, NIV

The context of this verse reminds us of our finiteness, but this time in the context of God's greatness. Two things seem essential today: First, God is the source of power and wisdom and seeking God is essential to our discipleship. Second, time is short—even if we are granted a long, full life. What are we doing with the gospel? Is it ours to hoard or ours to share?

Thursday: There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: -Ecclesiastes 3:1, NIV

Our English translations deliver us from an important error. There isn't time for everything, there is "a" time for everything. The difference is essential. We have to make decisions on the use of our time. Will we spend it all in the pursuit of money or fame; or will we spend our time on the things of God? Today would be a good day to conduct a "time inventory" in your life. What does your use of time reveal about your priorities?

Friday: Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. -Ephesians 5: 15-17, NIV

The book of Ephesians makes clear that wisdom and revelation are the work of the Spirit. What habits are you developing that ground you in the work of the Spirit? Give yourself to those. What habits are you developing that hinder your grounding in the Spirit? Be very careful, Paul says, and in wisdom invite the Spirit to direct your time.

Saturday: Review

Take a few moments today and think back over this week's devotions. Where did God speak? What are you learning? What changes have you made? Thank God for his faithfulness and prepare your heart for worship tomorrow.

Week Four

Grace Enough: Holiness of Heart and Life and Responsible Grace

Key Takeaway: John Wesley's theology and his methodology worked together to create a model for disciple making.

Learning Goals:

- Participants will understand Wesley's use of the phrase, “Holiness of heart and life” and its meaning.
- Participants will learn the key components of “responsible grace.”
- Participants will explore the interplay between *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy*.

Catching Up with One Another— (5 minutes) Upon arrival, invite group members to take a name tag and write on it one word that describes their day. Then have them wear the name tags and interact with one another based around what is written there.

Praying for One Another – (3 minutes) Led by the Group Leader

Getting to Know One Another: (5 minutes)

Describe one or two of the noteworthy traits of the most holy person you have ever personally known.

(Leaders Tip: Give the group a moment to think and then remind them to keep their responses brief.)

Today's Session: “Grace Enough: Holiness of Heart and Life and Responsible Grace”

(Group Leader—Share the following with the group. It is recommended to read the material a few times, making your own notes, and then present the material in a relatable format that avoids simply reading the text to the group.)

Where Are We Headed This Session? John Wesley was a man of extraordinary focus. He was passionate to see the people of England return to the faith of the primitive church, and he believed it was possible. While the focus of this training is more squarely on Wesley's methodology, it is important to have a working understanding of his theology as well.

Grace Enough: Holiness of Heart and Life and Responsible Grace

I. Holiness of Heart and Life (7 minutes)

In the *Minutes of Several Conversations*, John Wesley offers the most succinct statement of purpose for the Methodists. The question is framed to determine God's prerogative in raising up the movement.

Q.3. What may we reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the

Preachers called Methodists?

A. Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.

There is wide agreement that Wesley never wavered in his singular passion for the goal of scriptural holiness and nearly any Wesley scholar can detail the various attempts to derail Wesley from this aim. Whether the controversies be from his critics or his converts, Wesley maintained a “radical concern for true religion over against a nominal Christianity.” For him, true religion resulted in a transformation of both the heart and the actions of the believer.

By *salvation* [the Methodist] means *holiness of heart and life*... a Methodist is one who has “the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given to 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.”...[and] this commandment is written in his heart, that “he who loveth God, loves his brother also.” ...His obedience is in proportion to his love, the source from whence it flows. And therefore, loving God with all his heart, he serves him with all his strength...

This quote, and Wesley's other references to the subject, has led scholars to describe Wesley's highest ideal for the Christian to be “holiness of heart and life.” Kevin Watson illustrates when he describes that Wesley's understanding of sanctification was the primary doctrine which connected beliefs to actions, thus holiness of *both* heart and life. He says that Wesley understood entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, to be the particular doctrinal distinctive of Methodism. From John Wesley's own pen, then:

From this short sketch of Methodism (so called) any man of understanding may easily discern that it is only plain scriptural religion, guarded by a few prudential regulations. The essence of it is *holiness of heart and life*; the circumstantial all point to this.

Indeed, the unwavering focus of Wesley was the focus of the Methodists; holiness of heart and life was their point.

As detailed in previous weeks, the Nazarene Church traces its heritage to John Wesley and the Methodists but finds itself struggling to create an environment where people are taking seriously Jesus' call to discipleship. If one understands the call to discipleship to be, both in the scriptures and presently, the call to follow Jesus and take on his very nature, Wesley's dogged insistence on holiness of heart and life makes perfect sense. Holiness of heart and life is the highest aim of discipleship.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: What do you think is meant by the phrase, “holiness of heart and life?”

Ask: In your opinion, how prevalent is this emphasis in the church today?

Ask: What kinds of things could a church do to enhance its emphasis on holiness of heart and life?

II. Responsible Grace (7 minutes)

Randy Maddox's important book, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*, has become essential reading to any Wesley study. While offering a well-rounded and in-depth look at Wesley's understanding of grace, it has also become a useful shorthand for Wesley's discipleship theology in a nutshell. Maddox contends that Wesley's view of Christianity held a vital tension between two truths that he viewed as essential. Maddox explains that Wesley believed "without God's grace, we *cannot* be saved; while without our (grace-empowered, but uncoerced) participation, God's grace *will not* save."

Maddox refers to this in another phrase that has become common language in Wesley studies. He calls this Wesley's "orienting concern." Maddox writes:

I want to make clear that it is not simply one theological concept or metaphor among others. It is a perspective within which one construes (or a "worry" which one brings to) all of the various types of theological concepts. Second, in keeping with its meta-conceptual nature, an orienting concern is not an architectonic Idea from which all other theological affirmations would be deduced, or under which they must be subsumed. Its role is not to be the fountain from which doctrines spring or the pattern into which they must fit, but the abiding interest which influences the selection, interpretation, relative emphasis, and interweaving of theological affirmations and practices. Third, an orienting concern is often implicit, having been imbibed with one's theological nurture. It functions in theological reflection as a way of thinking that seems so natural and inevitable that it is seldom directly scrutinized. Instead, it is the light in which all else is scrutinized. Fourth, one need not have a comprehensive summary of the claims consistent with a particular orienting concern prior to engaging in theological reflection. In fact, it is precisely the search for consistent expressions in relation to new issues that enlivens a theological tradition. Fifth, it is probably possible to operate with more than one orienting concern. However, if Peter Slater is correct that religious traditions seek related clusters of primary symbols and that it is typically a central symbol which provides this relation, then the relative primacy of one orienting concern within an individual's practical-theological activity is likely. And finally, given Christianity's salvific emphasis, Christian orienting concerns will characteristically focus on the general issue of how God interacts with humanity.

Though perhaps an oversimplification, responsible grace represents the lenses through which John Wesley viewed the world. When Wesley considered the ultimate purposes of humanity, he saw those purposes enabled by the grace of God. Similarly, when Wesley considered the purposes of God, those purposes

always involved God offering grace to humanity.

Henry Knight picks up this thread as well, describing Wesley's image of "true religion." Knight offers four fundamental expressions which in many ways mirror Maddox.

First, the Christian life is most fundamentally lived as a response to God's love for us...Second, our love for God and our neighbor are core affections...which govern the Christian life...Third, these affections are relational, in that they constitute relationships with God and our neighbors...Fourth, Wesley equates this love, along with its attendant affections, with holiness.

To retrace the argument briefly: Wesley understood the goal of Christianity to be holiness. This holiness would not only be evidenced in the cleansing of the heart but would be expressed in the actions of the believer, namely love of God and neighbor. This was only possible in response to the gracious outpouring of God's grace upon humans. Through this framework, Wesley lived and ministered.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Process Randy Maddox's definition of responsible grace together: "Without God's grace, we *cannot* be saved; while without our (grace-empowered, but uncoerced) participation, God's grace *will not* save." What does this mean to you?

Ask: What are some of the ways that we can participate in God's responsible grace?

Ask: How would works of piety (loving God) and works of mercy (loving others) be qualified as responsible grace? Further, how would they impact our pursuit of holiness?

(3 minutes)

The preceding discussion has highlighted the impact of the early Methodist movement on 18th century England and presented the followers of John Wesley as a key embodiment of the cause of Christ. It has also pointed to John Wesley's understanding of grace as the work of God to enable the goal of the Christian experience—holiness of heart and life. It is important to return to Maddox's understanding of "responsible grace" as it balances the meritorious work of God with the human response to that work. To restate, "without God's grace, we *cannot* be saved; while without our (grace-empowered, but uncoerced) participation, God's grace *will not* save."

Right theology matters and current renewal efforts in this regard are welcome among the Nazarenes, but in its historical emphasis on holiness doctrine, the church is in danger of overlooking Wesley's best contribution to church history which is his method. What is needed for renewal within the Church of the

Nazarene then is born not from more emphasis on *orthodoxy*, but rather a return to John Wesley's distinctive *orthopraxy*. The significance of this is seen in the discussion of the Methodist's most defining feature, the means of grace. Next week's session will present the means of grace as the "responsible grace" pathway to holiness of heart and life.

(Allow 3 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Are there any questions on these theological points from tonight's discussion?

Weekly Practice: (10 minutes) This week practice praying "Thank You" prayers. Since we are reminded that our holiness is always in response to God's lavish grace, let's only pray prayers of thanks on Monday through Friday of this week. You will find this to be a challenge, but one well worth the effort. You will be amazed at how often we brush past thanksgiving to focus on petition in our prayers. Let's discipline our prayers in these days. By the way, it is still possible to make requests, but consider framing them something like, "God, thank you that you are able to meet my need for strength today:" or "God, thank you that you are already at work in my loved one's life today."

Daily Devotions: Remind the participants of the daily devotions offered on Central Church's social media so that they can reinforce what they are learning each day.

Prayer: Offer prayers for strength and focus for the group. Offer prayers for any needs of which the group is aware.

Dismiss within the 75 minute window to preserve the trust that these meetings will start and end on time. This discipline will help to keep morale high and participation consistent.

Daily Devotions

Monday: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. -2 Corinthians 1: 2-4, NIV

As we consider our response to God's outpouring of grace, this text helps us see the simplicity of the plan. We receive, by the mercies of God, comfort in our troubles so that we can, in turn, comfort others. God acts first, we respond by sharing his mercy with others. Here is Wesley's responsible grace in its most basic expression.

Tuesday: This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. -I John 4:10, NIV

Here again, John's epistle outlines the basic tenant of Wesley's theology of grace. God has acted first in love. Our response to God, empowered by the grace of God, enables us to have right relationship with God. What should a believer do with this love of God shed abroad in our hearts? Could we learn from Monday's devotional?

Wednesday: Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you... -Ephesians 3: 2, NIV

Paul describes his salvation and his call as a kind of "stewardship of God's grace." Though the NIV uses the word "administration," the sense of it is the care of something that belongs to someone else. Paul has received the grace of God in Christ Jesus and sees himself as a "steward" of this grace. It is not his to hoard but is rather his to share specifically with the Gentiles. Paul responds to God's grace with obedience and invites others to experience God's grace. And so, the pattern has continued to this very moment.

Thursday: For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...
-Titus 2: 11-13, NIV

So often, the grace of God is limited by our understanding. If God's grace is sufficient to save, surely it is sufficient to enable ministry. We often practice only half of this equation, focusing on redemption for ourselves, but then stopping the flow of this grace by not passing this good news along to those in our circles of influence. With whom might you share God's grace today?

Friday: He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.
-2 Timothy 1: 9-11, 13, NIV

Paul reminds young Timothy that he has been saved *and called*. Timothy is receiving from Paul what Paul has received from God. Timothy now must not only guard this truth but share it. How often we act as if the gospel is something to be protected! Our grace-inspired response to the good news is to preserve it, but not in protection, instead in giving it away. In what ways can you share this good news today?

Saturday: A Prayer of Examen
St. Ignatius of Loyola, some 400 years ago, taught the church to pray a simple prayer he called the "Daily Examen." This is a wonderful method of prayerful review that has been

adapted for many settings. Let's try it this week as a "Weekly Examen" prayer. Here are the steps:

- Prepare your heart and mind. Take a few deep breaths and focus on God.
- Review the week with gratitude. Think back through the events of your week, noting the joys and delights.
- Pay attention to your emotions during these events. Talk with God about how you were feeling. Often God uses our emotions to alert us to his work.
- Select a part of your week to pray over. Where were you successful in honoring God? Pray that God will help you to build on this. Where did you fail to honor God? Repent of this and ask God for renewed strength.
- Pray for the events of the next week that God would prepare you to be aware of his presence.

Week Five

From Here to There: John Wesley and the Means of Grace

Key Takeaway: John Wesley's understanding of the means of grace is critical to discipleship renewal among the Nazarenes.

Learning Goals:

- Participants will learn the origin of the phrase, “means of grace.”
- Participants will understand how Wesley defined the General means of grace.
- Participants will be able to explain Wesley’s Institutional means of grace and offer examples.

Catching Up with One Another— (5 minutes) Invite participants to spend a few moments interacting. As the Group Leader, use this time to observe the group. What do you see? Is there a sense of connection happening among the members? Is there any person that seems left out or more reluctant to engage with others? Who appears to exhibit leadership in this group? As you observe, there are several dynamics that might impact the way you lead but remember to be taking note of those who have potential for future leadership.

Praying for One Another – (3 minutes) Consider asking someone in the group to lead the prayer this session. If no one volunteers, take note of that and make a plan to invite someone personally before the session gathers next week. Praying in public, especially with short notice, often produces anxiety in people. Perhaps with a little advanced notice, someone will be ready to lead next session.

Getting to Know One Another: (5 minutes)

Can you describe a time in your life when it seemed like God’s presence was unusually present?

Today’s Session: “From Here to There: John Wesley and the Means of Grace”

(Group Leader—Stay diligent in your preparation so that you have the ability to teach with notes rather than simply reading this section to the group. Your hard work in preparing will make the material come alive for the participants and increase the likelihood that these concepts will take root in their lives.)

Where Are We Headed This Session? John Wesley did not invent the idea of the means of grace, but no one brought more definition to it than Wesley. Today we will begin to explore the importance of the means of grace.

Getting From Where We Are to Where We Want to Be (5 minutes)

While an ocean and nearly 300 years separate John Wesley’s ministry and Kansas City Central Church of the Nazarene, there is a shared passion for true religion

over against nominal Christianity. In order to counter-form believers in churches like Kansas City Central against the relentless pull of American consumerism, it is vital to return to both the theology and methodology of John Wesley. Nazarene's must rediscover Wesley's singular focus on holiness of heart and life *and* his practical application of the means of grace. In particular, a re-awakening to Wesley's most defining channel of God's grace, the prudential means, is the pathway to discipleship renewal and holiness of heart and life for the Nazarenes.

The next two sessions will help us understand the means of grace and why they are so important for our own discipleship and the pursuit of holiness.

John Wesley was convinced that spiritual progress toward holiness was not automatic. He believed, as the following quote shows, that believers had to engage with God's grace.

Men are generally lost in the hurry of life, in the business or pleasures of it, and seem to think that their regeneration, their new nature, will spring and grow up within them, with as little care and thought of their own as their bodies were conceived and have attained their full strength and stature; whereas, there is nothing more certain than that the Holy Spirit will not purify our nature, unless we carefully attend to his motions, which are lost upon us while, in the Prophet's language, we "scatter away our time,"—while we squander away our thoughts upon unnecessary things, and leave our spiritual improvement, the one thing needful, quite unthought of and neglected.

The church seems beset with what Wesley would call "dissipation," or being so busy with life's concerns that congregants have little capacity for attention to the things of the spiritual life. A larger concern is that this general neglect of growth in the direction of transformation is not unique to Central Church of the Nazarene but is rather the case in nearly all evangelical expressions of the church.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: What kinds of things keep Christians so busy that they neglect their spiritual growth?

Ask: In your opinion, where has the church gone wrong in its attempts to guide people into practices that inspire growth?

I. The Origins of the Means of Grace for John Wesley (5 minutes)

The phrase, "means of grace," is not unique to John Wesley. Scholars trace the origins of both the term and Wesley's adaptations of it pointing to its Puritan roots, its use in the Book of Common Prayer, and Wesley's early treatment of it in his 1746 sermon, *The Means of Grace*. Though he inherited the concept he synthesized its definition in the midst of theological controversy. It was not in the sterile environment of the academy where these concepts were

worked out, rather, it was Wesley's parish work that inspired the means of grace. Wesley scholars make reference to Wesley as a kind of "pastoral theologian" before he was a systematist. A systematist, or systematic theologian approaches theology in an orderly, almost scientific fashion. Wesley was a pastor and it is reflected in the ways that his teachings are organized not so much around clinical categories, but much more around the needs he understood his congregants to be facing. It is in this light that Wesley takes a major tenet of the Church of England and adapts it for the pursuit of holiness in the hearts and lives of those he shepherds. In his own words, Wesley defines the means of grace:

By "means of grace" I understand outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.

The means of grace are the ways that God works in the hearts and lives of people, through quite accessible channels, to bring about holiness. Importantly, however, believers must be active participants in that grace in a kind of practical marriage of God's work and human participation. One's responses to God's initiatives of grace can be described as "graced practices," which connotes the repetitive, therapeutic nature of the means of grace in producing transformation in the believer.

It may also become clear that the particular means of grace that Wesley champions are those things by which he had been formed. As stated earlier, John Wesley was a product of the Church of England; the son of devout parents; and a student of theology. As a result, his history created in Wesley both a desire for holiness and the raw materials to inspire the pursuit of holiness.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Let's just take some premature guesses at some things Wesley may have felt were important for his growth in holiness. What are some of your ideas?

Ask: Again, we are only just learning, but how does God pour grace through some of the things you listed?

II. The Framework of the Means of Grace (5 minutes)

Wesley understood the means of grace to be scriptural. In his message by the same title, he references scripture repeatedly, quoting the gospels, the writings of Paul and the book of James. He declares that not only did the apostles avail themselves of the means of grace, but so did our Lord.

Additionally, he understood the means of grace to be relational. By this Wesley intended to speak of the relationship between God and humanity. Grace is not something that deals only with the past in a juridical sense, but rather grace is

up to date, so to speak. God desires that his creation lives in relationship with God in the present. It makes sense, then, that the means of grace are the practices that facilitate this relationship. “God’s grace is conveyed to humanity and humanity in relationship responds to God. Overall, the means of grace are really God’s gifts to us. They are the ways we connect with God and participate in our relationship with him. As we open ourselves to God, God pours his own life and the grace we need into our hearts. When that happens, we will change; we will be spiritually formed and transformed.”

Wesley understood the means of grace to be essential. He was clear that the sole aim of the means was holiness of heart and life and without the solitary work of God this was impossible. Whether it be awakening a sinner to the need for faith or forming the believer into the likeness of Christ, the means of grace were the channels through which God’s grace and human response flowed.

(Allow 2 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Going back over our list of ways that God may pour out grace, do they meet the criteria of scriptural, relational, and essential? Why or why not?

III. The Various Means of Grace in Wesley

While Wesley never created a definitive list of the means of grace, scholars have poured over his sermons, journal entries, letters, and meeting minutes to create a fluid list. Henry H. Knight’s grouping seems to be the clearest approach. Knight lists three major categories for Wesley’s means of grace.

The General Means (5 minutes)

The first set identified by Knight is the General Means of Grace. While this category isn’t mentioned in Wesley’s sermon on the means of grace, it is first referenced in his Meeting in Conference in 1745. Pastor and scholar Andrew Thompson believes that without the general means of grace, the discussion of the efficacy of any other means of grace is pointless. In the meeting minutes of the conference Wesley records:

Q. 11. How should we wait for the fulfilling of this promise [of entire sanctification]?

A. In universal obedience; in keeping all the commandments; in denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily. These are the general means which God hath ordained for our receiving his sanctifying grace.

For Thompson, the general means of grace are less practices and more an awareness of “...one’s motivations in thought, word, and action...that collectively constitute a kind of faithful disposition toward all that one does in pursuit of sanctification.” Like the soil is to the flower, the general means are the disposition out of which the other means flourish. In short, when we choose to follow Jesus, God gives us the grace needed to practice obedience and self-denial.

The Instituted Means

The next category Knight lists are the Instituted Means of Grace. Wesley specifically mentions three instituted means in his sermon on the means of grace. These are prayer, searching the scriptures, and the Lord's supper. However, in his later works he adds fasting and Christian conferencing. Wesley understood these to be appointed by God and universal to the church in all eras and cultures—thus, instituted. While it seems clear that these are the practices of a believer, Wesley spends considerable time in his sermon illustrating how these same means might lead one to conversion. In the Instituted Means, Wesley believed that God had specifically ordained these practices to be conduits of grace.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: In your own words, how do you see the instituted means of grace supporting our decision to follow Jesus?

Ask: In what ways have these means of grace been important in your own spiritual growth?

Specific Instituted Means – (5 minutes)

With regard to prayer, Wesley believed that all prayer should come from the heart in sincerity. Perhaps this accounts for his expansion of a rigid formal prayer life to one punctuated by extemporaneous prayers. Wesley believed that prayers should be characterized by petition, confession, intercession, and thanksgiving and often used written prayers as a guide. For Wesley, prayer must be communication from the heart of God to the heart of the believer and vice versa.

Searching the scriptures was essential to the life of the believer as Wesley modeled. As a Christian leader, Wesley was at the same time well-read and also *homo unis libri*, Latin for “a man of one book.” It was the scriptures that provided the foundation for his life and ministry and also constituted the channel through which God could pour his sanctifying grace.

The Lord's Supper has been called the chief among Wesley's means of grace. Wesley believed that since Jesus had specifically instructed his followers to receive the Lord's Supper, that it was incumbent upon the believer to comply. It was for him the food for the soul as a memorial to Christ's atoning work, the real presence of Christ in the act of communing, and a promise of the coming glory. Wesley was known to receive the Lord's Supper at least weekly and admonished his Methodists to receive communion as often as possible.

Wesley believed in and practiced fasting as a means of grace. He believed that abstinence from food was a worthwhile practice as it opened up more time for prayer and also defeated the grip of temporal things over us reminding us of our dependence upon God.

His views on Christian conferencing are insightful as well. For Wesley, conferencing might include gatherings for fellowship and instruction as we might more traditionally define a conference. But Wesley also viewed rightly ordered conversations which offer channels of God's grace to believers as a means of grace.

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Do any of the instituted means of grace surprise you? Why?

Ask: Of the five instituted means of grace, which ones do you practice most regularly? Which ones do you struggle to practice?

Ask: Do you think Wesley got this right? Are there other things you see in scripture and early Christianity that seem to be channels of God's grace?

Weekly Practice: (10 minutes) Choose any two of the five instituted means of grace and make a special effort to practice them this week. For instance, if you choose to search the scriptures, change it up by using a different translation. If you choose prayer, try searching for some written prayers of the saints and praying those. If you choose fasting, try giving up on meal this week and using the time to pray. Perhaps your church will be sharing in communion this weekend and you can be especially sensitive to the work of the Spirit during that time. Maybe you could engage in a conversation with a trusted Christian friend that would offer God the chance to speak into your life. Whatever you choose, give your whole self to it and see what God teaches you.

Daily Devotions: Remind the participants of the daily devotions offered on Central Church's social media so that they can reinforce what they are learning each day.

Prayer: Offer prayers for strength and focus for the group. Offer prayers for any needs of which the group is aware.

Dismiss within the 75 minute window to preserve the trust that these meetings will start and end on time. This discipline will help to keep morale high and participation consistent.

Daily Devotions

Monday: Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. -John 14:23, NIV

The general means of grace remind us that when we turn our lives over to Jesus, he offers to us the grace to live up to the scripture above. If we imagine that obedience is purely human effort, we have misunderstood the work of God's grace. Even our obedience is made possible through the grace of God. Do you have areas where you struggle to obey? What does it mean that God is enabling that obedience by his grace?

Tuesday: Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny

themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. -Luke 9: 23-24, NIV

Self-denial by definition is a challenge. It is difficult to go against our body's wants and needs. However, Jesus presents an amazing paradox in this text. Jesus promises that in our denial of self we will find salvation. Wesley would remind us today that God will strengthen us for the self-denial and then offer to us new life. God is present and doing the heavy lifting. Let's do our part in response.

Wednesday: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." -Matthew 26: 41, NIV

The context of this passage is Jesus praying in the garden at Gethsemane. His disciples are struggling to join him in prayer. So often we are led around by our "flesh." But the call to follow Jesus is the call to be led by the Spirit. It is God's Spirit that strengthens us and enables us follow. Prayer, as Wesley would remind us, is an essential practice for the people of God.

Thursday: But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. -2 Timothy 3: 14-17, NIV

This may be the clearest admonition to search the scriptures in the New Testament. Paul is counseling young Timothy to study in order to receive wisdom in the things of God and so that Timothy can lead well. Paul reminds Timothy, and by extension all of us, that the scriptures are the inspired word of God. Wesley championed the scriptures in all things, particularly as they led us to grow in holiness of heart and life. What is your relationship with the scriptures today? Would God invite you to change that?

Friday: And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. --Hebrews 10: 24-25, NIV

Wesley championed Christian conferencing as a means of grace. God works in the God-centered relationships we have. We indeed, "spur one another on toward love and good deeds." Isolation is the enemy of holiness and meeting together, expecting God to speak is a way that God pours Godself into us. What would it take for you to change the way you relate to others in order to open your heart to receive God's grace?

Saturday: A Prayer of Examen

St. Ignatius of Loyola, some 400 years ago, taught the church to pray a simple prayer he called the "Daily Examen." This is a wonderful method of prayerful review that has been

adapted for many settings. Let's try it this week as a "Weekly Examen" prayer. Here are the steps:

- Prepare your heart and mind. Take a few deep breaths and focus on God.
- Review the week with gratitude. Think back through the events of your week, noting the joys and delights.
- Pay attention to your emotions during these events. Talk with God about how you were feeling. Often God uses our emotions to alert us to his work.
- Select a part of your week to pray over. Where were you successful in honoring God? Pray that God will help you to build on this. Where did you fail to honor God? Repent of this and ask God for renewed strength.
- Pray for the events of the next week that God would prepare you to be aware of his presence.

Week Six

From Here to There: John Wesley and the Means of Grace (Part 2)

Key Takeaway: The prudential means of grace gave John Wesley the freedom to adapt and innovate toward his goal of holiness of heart and life.

Learning Goals:

- Participants will learn what Wesley meant by using the phrase, “the prudential means of grace.”
- Participants will understand the interplay between Wesley's three categories of the means of grace.
- Participants will discover the implications that the prudential means of grace have for the Church of the Nazarene.

Catching Up With One Another – (5 minutes) Can you identify a way that God poured grace into your life that you did not expect?

Praying for One Another – (3 minutes) If you have a volunteer ready, invite that person to lead the group in an opening prayer. If you haven't prepared a volunteer, you may ask if anyone feels comfortable leading. If not, simply lead the prayer yourself.

Getting to Know One Another: (5 minutes)

Describe the most unique ministry you have ever seen or experienced personally and why it stands out in your thinking.

Today's Session: “From Here to There: John Wesley and the Means of Grace” (Part 2)

(2 minutes)

(Group Leader—This is the second lesson dealing with the means of grace. It might be a good idea to ask the group to summarize the general and instituted means of grace as a way to prepare them for this session.)

*General Means of Grace: The grace of God that, upon our choice to follow Jesus, helps us to choose obedience and self-denial.

*Instituted Means of Grace: Those scriptural practices that deepen our relationship with God whereby God can pour grace into our lives.

Where Are We Headed This Session? No concept was more integral to Wesley's effectiveness in discipleship than the prudential means of grace. Today we'll come to understand it more clearly.

The Prudential Means of Grace (4 minutes)

Few would argue that what Wesley termed the “instituted” means of grace; prayer, searching the scriptures, the Lord’s Supper, fasting, and Christian conferencing were in fact scriptural and obvious ways in which God pours out grace. Where Wesley’s uniqueness is demonstrated is in his concept of what he termed the “prudential” means of grace. In the Larger Minutes of 1778, Wesley introduced the concept of the Prudential Means of Grace. He identifies the prudential means of grace as:

1. Particular rules or acts of holy living
2. Class and band meetings
3. Prayer meetings, covenant services, watch night services, love feasts.
4. Visiting the sick.
5. Doing all the good one can, doing no harm.
6. Reading devotional classics and all edifying literature.

While Knight identifies these hallmarks of early Methodism as prudential, he also allows that in the spirit of the prudential understanding of the means of grace, other things may prove graced by God. The underlying argument of this training is that it was specifically the prudential means of grace that set Methodism apart and were the practical reasons for its rapid growth and effectiveness in fostering holiness. Further, it will be in the spirit of the prudential means of grace that Nazarene’s find a foundation for discipleship renewal in the days to come.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: What are your initial thoughts regarding the things that John Wesley listed as prudential means of grace?

Ask: Do you think that other activities might prove to be “prudential” in our day and time? If so, what might be an example? If not, why not?

I. The Origins of the Prudential Means (7 minutes)

While true that the concept of the means of grace predated Wesley, it is important to trace, in as much as is possible, the origins of the prudential means as Wesley understood them. For this, one must look to the words and actions of Wesley himself, but also to the environments in which Wesley lived and ministered.

Wesley’s home life and education were significant factors in his development of the prudential means of grace. While his father may have favored classical theology, his mother was left with the task of raising children who would know and serve God. No doubt Suzanna’s Puritan heritage steeped her in prudence and before her children could articulate it, Suzanna Wesley was modeling the prudential means of grace in her interactions with them. She wanted to see her children love and serve God and was motivated to find the means to this end. Her strict routines, her weekly meetings with each child, and her insistence on the primacy of scripture and prayer, all done within the context of 18th century

English homelife, were expressions of what Wesley would later practice as prudential means of grace.

Additionally, John Wesley was influenced by the education he received in the spirit of the day in which he lived. Wesley was well read in John Locke's philosophy and empiricism. It was inevitable that the popular trends in learning would influence the development of his ministry. "That Wesley tried to accommodate his theology to the 'experimental' philosophies of his day seems to be well established."

It follows, then, that these influences would become apparent in the ministry of John Wesley. In his *Thoughts Upon Methodism*, Wesley wrote,

"From this short sketch of Methodism (so called) any man of understanding may easily discern that it is only plain scriptural religion, guarded by a few prudential regulations. The essence of it is holiness of heart and life; the circumstantial all point to this."

Wesley scholar, Kenneth Collins, picks up this theme:

Positively, the prudential means of grace provide the structure, the parameters, through which the greatest advances in grace can be realized in Christian practice. In other words, prudential means are those which are considered prudent by an enlightened reason and by informed experience and which direct and guide the spiritual life as it continues to encounter the rich grace of God both in and through these particular practices. Wesley called them 'arts of holy living.'"

Collins continues:

"...in the creation of prudential norms, reason must survey and assess tradition, experience, and general moral principles culled from scriptures. In drawing up prudential norms, the reason also looks at the goal of salvation, that is, the restoration of the image of God—all of this in order to determine the good for specific situations."

In Wesley's own *A Plain Account of the People Called the Methodists*, he lifts up the use of reason in helping to discern the way forward for both the movement and for those who sought advice on how to grow spiritually. It appears that from the outset it was not only the scriptures that framed Wesley's development of the means of grace, but also reason and necessity. Many of the developments that later proved key to the success of Methodism, like the class meeting, the penny collection, and the watch night services, were driven by reason and necessity and became prudential means of God's grace. Over and again in *A Plain Account of the People Called the Methodists* one can see the prudent and practical side of Wesley. Perhaps most telling are these words,

"...the scripture, in most points, gives only general rules; and leaves the particular circumstances to be adjusted by the common sense of

mankind... That is, they are methods which men have found, by reason and common sense, for the more effectually applying several Scriptural rules, couched in general terms to particular occasions.”

It is clear, then, that as John Wesley applied himself to the cause of holiness of heart and life, he drew from his experience and environment to adopt those practices which would be channels through which God could pour grace. These pious and reasoned practices Wesley termed the prudential means of grace.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: That is a lot of information about the prudential means of grace. Can anyone summarize it for us in your own words?

*The Prudential Means of Grace: those actions made clear by reason and necessity that God uses to help his followers grow in holiness of heart and life.

Ask: Based on what you understand about the needs of the church today, can you imagine any ministries that God could use as prudential means of grace for our times that John Wesley could have never imagined?

II. The Interdependence of the Means of Grace (5 minutes)

The whole goal of the Christian, for Wesley, was holiness of heart and life and the means of grace were the ways that God brought this to pass. Seeing that from time to time the traditional means of grace in the Church of England grew routine and ceased to present occasions for spiritual progress, Wesley offered other “prudential” means to achieve these ends.

Here is captured one of the most important aspects of Wesley’s means of grace- that they operate best when they operate together. One can picture the 18th century Methodist faithfully attending the Church of England; hearing sermons, participating in the Lord’s Supper, and experiencing the liturgy; but also attending a society meeting; gathering together for accountability, godly counsel, faithful instruction, hymn singing, testimonies, and prayer. For Wesley, both were essential to the pursuit of holiness of heart and life, and evident in his own personal practice. Through any of these means the grace of God was conveyed in sanctifying ways.

It is important to note that the very innovations and adaptations of Wesley’s ministry were legitimized by his theology of the means of grace. The hallmarks of the Methodist movement; societies, class meetings, bands, covenant services, conferencing, and love feasts, were all made possible because Wesley saw them as channels through which God’s grace could flow.

Wesley was adamant that early Methodism was the *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* (church within the church). The larger church provided the liturgical worship and sacraments; the smaller intentional communities the nurture and accountability necessary for real transformation. The faithful practice of the interdependent means of grace was Wesley's path to sanctification. "Those who share Wesley's vision of the Christian life need at the same time to insist on a complete pattern of the means of grace."

(Allow 5 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: In your opinion, why would a Christian need both the instituted and the prudential means of grace in her/his life?

Ask: What is something that has become an important part of your Christian practice that could be considered a prudential means of grace?

Ask: How important is a "sanctified imagination" in the prudential means of grace?

III. The Implications of the Prudential Means of Grace (5 minutes)

Without question, John Wesley was thoroughly grounded in the Anglicanism of his day and an orthodox theologian. Wesley was also a realist. As his ministry increasingly spread from the academy to the coal yards, Wesley developed a more robust understanding of the means of grace. While he never rejected the instituted means, he was able to understand and teach that God's sanctifying grace was conveyed through more than just the rituals of the Church of England. Wesley was willing to adapt a wide variety of concepts and practices that not only rounded out his theology, but more importantly made him highly effective in his pastoral ministry.

Henry Knight's insistence that we frame Wesley's means of grace in the relationship one develops with God leads him to conclude that there is never a time in the believer's life when the means of grace are not necessary. At the same time, Knight and others remind us never to attempt to simply replicate Wesley's means of grace in the modern day. A better alternative is to understand the spirit behind Wesley's means of grace and make fresh applications in current circumstances. This appears to swing wide the door for pastors and leaders in the 21st century to carefully explore new avenues for God's grace to be poured out on believers in pursuit of sanctification.

Similarly, the means of grace, in particular the prudential means, are best imagined as ways to engage people at the point of their need. The sheer complexity of human need surely calls for the church to enlist all of its creative prowess under the direction of the Holy Spirit to teach believers that God's grace is available. This is recapturing the Spirit of Wesley for the modern day.

Wesley in his day didn't see grace confined to the practices of the official church, but certainly adopted and adapted new practices to urge people forward in

the pursuit of holiness of heart and life. Grace was God's loving and uncreated presence; therefore, it was dynamic and applicable to the changing needs of people.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Why shouldn't we just repeat all of the things Wesley did in our efforts to reinvigorate the pursuit of holiness in our churches today?

Ask: As you consider the implications of the prudential means of grace today, where could the church look for effective ways to engage people in the pursuit of holiness?

IV. Further Implications of the Prudential Means for Discipleship Renewal for the Church of the Nazarene (5 minutes)

The implications of Wesley's application of the means of grace seem vital to the renewal of discipleship within the Church of the Nazarene. A quick glance at the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene is encouraging as the phrase, "means of grace" is mentioned six times. Significantly, however, the means of grace are neither defined specifically nor applied in any transformational way. It appears that the use of the phrase connects to a corporate memory that has been lost over the decades. There is an implied relationship between the Nazarene goal of holiness and the means of grace, however the church does not seem to explicitly connect the two in the way Wesley and the Methodists did. Sadly, then, the true impact of the prudential means of grace remains inaccessible to Nazarenes in pursuit of their therapeutic impact toward holiness.

Wesley's prudential means of grace offer a framework in which the Nazarenes can work. The church can embrace, as Wesley did, creative and practical expressions of the faith without fear of becoming merely pragmatic. While always practical, the prudential means of grace are not given to the failures of pragmatism because the prudential means are always subordinate to the scriptures. In this way, the scriptures define and govern the inclusion of reasonable practices that mediate God's grace.

The prudential means of grace also focus clearly on the goal of holiness. In a consumeristic church era, whatever draws a crowd may be championed as effective, but all manner of things can draw a crowd. For something to be authentically prudential, it must serve to lead people onward in the work of sanctification. It must truly be a channel through which God can pour out grace. The faithful work of the Spirit can help the church discern what practices are effective at leading people toward sanctification.

Similarly, Wesley teaches the church to employ reason and common sense in evaluating the prudential means of grace. A kind of sanctified ingenuity

characterized Wesley's system for making disciples. It is time to reimagine the methods that the Church of the Nazarene depends upon in disciple-making efforts.

Weekly Practice: (10 minutes) This week select a ministry from your local church and, based on what you've learned, list all the ways in which it qualifies as a prudential means of grace. Then, send a note of encouragement to the leader of the ministry thanking them for their faithful efforts to help people in their pursuit of holiness.

Daily Devotions: Remind the participants of the daily devotions offered on Central Church's social media so that they can reinforce what they are learning each day.

Prayer: Offer prayers for strength and focus for the group. Offer prayers for any needs of which the group is aware.

Dismiss within the 75 minute window to preserve the trust that these meetings will start and end on time. This discipline will help to keep morale high and participation consistent.

Daily Devotions

Monday: Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. -Galatians 6: 9-10, NIV

Wesley's simple admonition to "do all the good you can" has its basis in scripture. This is an example of the primacy Wesley gave to scripture. What is intriguing, however, is that this passage leaves the specific deeds up to the believer. Again, in the spirit of Wesley, there is room for creativity in the application of the scripture. This is an example of the scripture calling us to practice the prudential means of grace.

Tuesday: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." -Matthew 10:16, NIV

Jesus is sending out the twelve disciples in his name in this text. He is advising them to act with intentionality, because they will meet resistance. John Wesley believed that the prudential means of grace offered him the chance to employ both reason and necessity in finding ways to lead people toward holiness. The spirit of this text should be in our minds as we reimagine our discipleship efforts. Let's ask God to give us this blend of holy strategy in our discipleship.

Wednesday: Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. -I Thessalonians 5: 16-22, NIV

Wesley's prudential admonition to “do no harm” is grounded in the text of scripture, both Old Testament and New Testament. Rejecting evil is possible with the help of the Spirit. Importantly, however, Wesley realized that gathering with others increased the likelihood of living up to the call of Christ. This is why so many of his prudential means of grace find expression in groups of people. Where are you joining with others in your pursuit of holiness?

Thursday: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. - Deuteronomy 6: 4-9, NIV

It is no secret that John Wesley was profoundly influenced by his home life. In particular, his mother, Suzanna, engrained in young John the prudential means of grace. Her focus was clearly on John’s growth in holiness and she employed many means to this end. What is the legacy we are leaving behind to our children and extended family? What will our friends remember about us? The text above admonishes us to, in the spirit of Suzanna Wesley, invest ourselves in those who come behind us.

Friday: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” --Luke 15: 4-7, NIV

John Wesley had a passion for the lost. He didn’t care to build a large congregation or ornate buildings; he only wanted to see those who were lost and desperate come to faith in Jesus Christ. His ministry even took him from the comforts of the sanctuary to the colonies and the coal yards. Do we share Wesley's passion for the lost? Are we willing to sacrifice in order that others may come to faith in Jesus? It was this passion for the lost that helped Wesley discover the prudential means of grace.

Saturday: A Prayer of Examen

St. Ignatius of Loyola, some 400 years ago, taught the church to pray a simple prayer he called the “Daily Examen.” This is a wonderful method of prayerful review that has been adapted for many settings. Let’s try it this week as a “Weekly Examen” prayer. Here are the steps:

- Prepare your heart and mind. Take a few deep breaths and focus on God.
- Review the week with gratitude. Think back through the events of your week,

noting the joys and delights.

- Pay attention to your emotions during these events. Talk with God about how you were feeling. Often God uses our emotions to alert us to his work.
- Select a part of your week to pray over. Where were you successful in honoring God? Pray that God will help you to build on this. Where did you fail to honor God? Repent of this and ask God for renewed strength.
- Pray for the events of the next week that God would prepare you to be aware of his presence.

Week Seven

Watching Over One Another in Love: Accountability and Discipleship

Key Takeaway: One of the missing ingredients in effective discipleship today is the loving accountability exhibited in the early Methodist class meeting.

Learning Goals:

- Participants will understand Wesley's intentions in “watching over one another in love.”
- Participants will learn the format and importance of the class meeting in early Methodism.
- Participants will understand how the class meeting is an example of a prudential means of grace.

Catching Up With One Another— (4 minutes) Week seven is a good moment to observe the interactions of the group noting, once again, those who seem warm, those who seem to keep more to themselves, those who exhibit leadership traits. Take note of who initiates interaction and those who are still chatting or moving toward their seat when you are ready to begin. These may be those who help in leadership or recruiting in the months ahead.

Praying for One Another – (3 minutes) If you have a volunteer ready, invite that person to lead the group in an opening prayer. If you haven't prepared a volunteer, you may ask if anyone feels comfortable leading. If not, simply lead the prayer yourself.

Getting to Know One Another: (2 minutes)

What are the most popular expressions of group accountability in our culture right now? (Leader's Note: Some popular ones might include Alcoholics Anonymous, Weight Watchers, Cross Fit, etc.)

Today's Session: “Watching Over One Another in Love: Accountability and Discipleship”

(Group Leader: This would be a great time to briefly remind the group of where you have been in these sessions. Remind them using the titles of the sessions and ask them to offer a few comments regarding what stood out to them in the learning.)

Where Are We Headed This Session? We are headed toward a reintroduction of accountability in discipleship.

Watching Over One Another in Love (4 minutes)

Wesley's desire to guide people into holiness of heart and life kept him busily adjusting his methods until he could find a practical and effective way forward. “Wesley's theological understanding...led him to adopt what first

seemed an unbelievably straightforward solution: a weekly meeting of like-minded persons who would exercise a mutual accountability for their discipleship.” A Key component of Wesley's Methodists that gathers together what we've been learning is an expression of accountable discipleship that David Lowes Watson termed, “Covenant Discipleship.” Wesley's letter, *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, summarizes what would eventually become a hallmark of Methodism. “They therefore united themselves ‘in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they might help each other to work out their salvation.’”

At the very core of the success of the Methodist revival was John Wesley's insistence on accountability. It was Wesley who, after preaching, gathered together those who had been awakened and organized them into smaller groups where there would be an ongoing sense of accountability for spiritual progress toward holiness. As is often noted, it was in a sense, easier to *join* a Methodist group than it was to *remain* in one. Yet it is precisely this accountability that made spiritual awakenings stick and grow into holiness of heart and life.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Where does the church you attend require accountability?

Ask: Do you think accountability is important for lasting change? Why or why not?

The Early Methodist Class Meeting (5 minutes)

The class meeting was the most influential instructional unit in Methodism and probably Wesley's greatest contribution to the church. It was also the class meeting where all Methodists were held accountable for their spiritual growth. Henry Ward Beecher said, “The greatest thing John Wesley ever gave to this world is the Methodist class meeting.” Dwight L. Moody, 19th century revivalist, offered this commendation: “The Methodist class meetings are the best institutions for training converts the world ever saw.” It was in the class meeting that Wesley was able to finally fulfill his heart's desire to help people make progress in the pursuit of holiness.

The Origins of the Class Meeting

Wesley discovered this means of accountability by accident. In an effort to retire the debt of the society meeting in Bristol, the idea was adopted to have a weekly penny collection from every member of the society. Once instituted something surprising began to happen. Those who were visited in the collection of the offering soon began to share about the condition of their souls. Wesley took note of this and soon discovered the means of accountability that would mark Methodism for all of time.

“This is the thing; the very thing we have wanted so long.’ I called together all the leaders of the classes (so we used to term them and their companies) and desired that each would make a particular inquiry into the

behavior of those who he saw weekly...as soon as possible, the same method was used in London and all other places.” Thus began the early Methodist class meeting.

That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies called “classes,” according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in every class, one of who is styled the Leader. It is his business: (1) To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require: to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor...

The format was surprisingly simple and effective. After beginning precisely on the hour, a hymn was sung, and the leader began by giving a short testimonial to the condition of his/her soul. The leader’s role was crucial as it set the tone for the vulnerability of the rest of the group. Open sharing regarding the successes and failures of the leader invited similar vulnerability in the members. Importantly, the class meetings were not designed for doctrinal ideology or scriptural instruction. The order of the day was personal experiences in walking out the pursuit of holiness. This created an informal but highly effective leveling among the members engendering a spirit of nurture and collegiality.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: From what we just learned; what parts of Wesley's model seem applicable today?

Ask: How important is the group leader in Wesley's system? Why is that?

The Class Meeting in Wesley's Organizational System (5 minutes)

The various meetings of the Methodists were carefully scheduled so as not to conflict with the services of the Church of England. Wesley’s intentions, as noted, were not to compete with the church but rather to provide a component missing from the larger church, namely, a vehicle for the pursuit of holiness of heart and life.

The first category of the system was the Society. The society was intended to include all of the Methodists in a given locale. “The primary function of the society was cognitive instruction: it was the educational channel by which the tenets of Methodism were presented to the target population.”

Chronologically, the next category Wesley created were the Bands. His idea was straightforward; people would be grouped together and taken through a series of questions in a catechetical (question and answer) manner. The questions pulled no punches:

1. Have you peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ?

2. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?
3. Do you desire to be told of your faults?
4. Do you desire that every one of us should tell you, from time to time, whatsoever is in his heart concerning you?
5. Do you desire that, in doing this, we should come close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?

At least two things seem obvious from this line of questioning. The first is a glimpse into Wesley's upbringing and perhaps what it would have been like in the Holy Club. The second is, according to David Lowes Watson, that this intensity, especially for the newly converted, was a case of "too much too soon." Ordinary working-class converts were not yet ready to deepen their faith in this way. They were simply trying to hold on to what faith they already had. Wesley loved this category, and it would remain in Methodism, but something else was needed between the society and the band.

The class meeting was precisely the instrument that Wesley was seeking. It was stringent enough to engage and challenge the new Methodists, yet not so advanced as to overwhelm them. Additionally, the accountability was transferred to the group which inevitably governed the intensity of the interactions initially and enabled the group to progress together.

This category Wesley would term "that excellent institution." He likened it to the "sinews" which hold together the human body and as a result, the class meeting was the very muscle of the Methodist movement.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Why do you think Wesley said so much about the "little church within the bigger church?"

Ask: Why do you think the class meeting was so effective?

How Wesley's Class Meeting Reflects a Prudential Means of Grace (2 minutes)

Wesley considered his entire group system to be an effort to return to the primitive faith of the New Testament church. The class meeting was the most widely practiced and effective expression of this conviction. Perhaps more important than any of the other identified prudential means of Methodism, was Wesley's insistence on a small group structure for training converts. In the class meeting, Wesley understood his Methodists to be recovering the faith of the early church.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Can you think of any scriptural references that seem to support Wesley's idea of the class meeting? Some suggestions include: Hebrews 10:25, Colossians 4:15, and Acts 5:42.

Ask: Based on your understanding, how is the class meeting a prudential means of grace?

Key and Transferable Components of the Class Meeting to a Nazarene Setting

(5 minutes)

Making application of these concepts to the Church of the Nazarene begins with noting that John Wesley and the Nazarene's share a common target; helping people grow in holiness. Nothing was more central to Wesley's goals than to overcome the nominal faith of his day. This passion, while central to the historical formation of the Nazarenes, is waning in these days and must be resuscitated. Key to any recovery of the methodology of Wesley will mean cultivating a biblically grounded and theologically balanced sense of what it means to be a real disciple. The concept of accountable discipleship is aimed primarily at this target and the class meeting was the environment where Wesley saw it happen. There is a genuine hunger in the lives of American Nazarene's to actually make progress in the holiness so often proclaimed in its churches. By applying the underlying principles of the early Methodist class meeting, this hunger can be addressed.

Similarly, Nazarene's can benefit from the traditioned innovation class meeting because the focus is less on pedagogy and biblical expertise and more on the catechetical practice of living together by covenant. This approach will be new to most Nazarene congregations. As noted, most Sunday School and small group ministries today fall into the respective ditches of either lecture-based instruction or surface-level sharing about common concerns. The class meeting centers around a new approach of holding one another accountable to previously agreed upon expressions of the means of grace. The groups having been introduced to the principles of Wesley and the means of grace, meet together around the covenant they have created and, in a question-and-answer format, "watch over one another in love," being sure that members are living into the agreement formed by the group.

Likewise, these groups will model two things largely missing from postmodern churches—vulnerability and accountability. In the refreshed class meeting model, the leader goes first in honestly relating her/his successes and failures in living into the agreed upon covenant. In so doing, the leader is modeling the means of relating for the rest of the group. The early Methodist class meeting demonstrated the power of this simple approach. As Christians openly shared in an environment built around the expectation that the covenant would be upheld, life transformation took place. This can be recaptured in Nazarene

Churches today.

Finally, there are a host of other important principles of the early Methodist class meeting that can be translated into today's Nazarene settings.

Note: The facilitator should choose to highlight any of these as time may permit.

- Wesley's groups were not specifically linked to age. There was an element of intergenerational participation that could be recovered in churches today.
- Wesley's groups were divided up by geography more than anything else, so that members could take seriously the call to loving accountability.
- Women were also key leaders in the early Methodist classes. How complimentary to the Nazarene emphasis on equality.
- This model also lends itself to repeatability.
- Inevitably the covenant-based discipleship model does foster strong connections between its members.
- Lastly, the early Methodist class meeting became the first level of leadership training for the movement. Class leaders who proved faithful and effective often because a part of Wesley's greater leadership structure. How essential for the renewal of the church to be led by people who are serious in their pursuit of holiness.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Of the reasons listed above, which ones stand out for you as important in your current setting?

Ask: How do you think you would adapt to the vulnerability and accountability necessary for accountable discipleship to take place?

A Contemporary Model of Accountable Discipleship for Kansas City Central Church

(4 minutes)

This accountability must be a part of any efforts toward true discipleship renewal. While worship services are essential, even from a Wesleyan perspective, they offer very little accountability. While small groups offer places to connect with others and share life experiences in the context of Christian fellowship, precious few offer any accountable expectations that the members will make tangible progress toward holiness. Even the Sunday School with its classic interest in biblical instruction, lacks a strong sense of accountability in post-modern America.

What is needed is a new effort to re-form American Nazarene's in the essential importance of accountability as it relates to life-transformation. While perhaps a new expression of discipleship within the Nazarene church, this emphasis on accountability should not come as a surprise to Americans. No one

would argue with the effectiveness of the Alcoholics Anonymous groups or Saddleback Community's, Celebrate Recovery. Both of these highly effective programs have accountability to others as a centerpiece. Similarly, Americans regularly adopt Weight Watchers or other weight loss programs which require accountability through weekly weigh-ins and input from a coach. Likewise, Cross-fit and other similar movements are sweeping America. They require participants to join a group, show up to workouts, and pay a fee all to help them achieve their fitness goals. Americans seem to have figured out that actual change happens best in the context of supportive accountability to others. What these relatively recent movements hold as of critical importance was actually figured out long ago in Methodism's groups; namely that supportive accountability leads to lasting change.

Next week we will begin the process of working on a covenant together that will provide the basis for our next three months together.

Weekly Practice: (10 minutes) Select someone from the group to be an accountability partner this week. Each party should decide on a simple item upon which to hold the other party accountable. For instance, a person could ask to be held accountable for prayer each day; not overeating; limiting the number of soft drinks; or almost anything else. The parties should agree on how to report their relative successes or failures. This practice will begin to make participants aware of how it feels to live in accountability to others.

Daily Devotions: Remind the participants of the daily devotions offered on Central Church's social media so that they can reinforce what they are learning each day.

Prayer: Offer prayers for strength and focus for the group. Offer prayers for any needs of which the group is aware.

Dismiss within the 75 minute window to preserve the trust that these meetings will start and end on time. This discipline will help to keep morale high and participation consistent.

Daily Devotions

Monday: You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written:

“As surely as I live,” says the Lord,
‘every knee will bow before me;
every tongue will acknowledge God.’”

So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. -Romans 14:12, NIV

The scriptures are filled with the concept of accountability despite the reality that our current value systems diminish its value. This week's devotions begin by establishing

that our primary accountability is to God. Each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. As you consider this reality, what kinds of emotions spring up within you? Spend time praying about those emotions and see how the Spirit of God instructs you.

Tuesday: Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. -James 5:16, NIV

Today's text reminds us that accountability is not only meant as a threat but is often a blessing. This is the spirit of Wesley's class meeting. The groups were free to confess knowing that what followed would not be judgment but rather a supportive word and a loving challenge to improve. How can we see the accountable relationships in our lives transformed into this kind of support?

Wednesday: Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. -I Thessalonians 5:11, NIV

Paul is writing to encourage the Thessalonians as they consider the Day of the Lord, but his admonishments have a broader application. In the arena of discipleship and growth toward holiness, what is more powerful than an encouraging community of friends? The class meeting and its current re-interpretations have at their foundation a community of loving support. As Wesley termed it; "watching over one another in love." How could you strengthen your work of encouragement in these days?

Thursday: As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. -Proverbs 27:17, NIV

The power of Christian community is not a new idea. Here in the ancient Hebrew wisdom literature the concept of accountable discipleship is evident. There is real transformational power in loving accountability. As you prepare to enter into a three-month season of accountable discipleship, keep in mind that your mutual work will be with the purpose of effective growth in Christ.

Friday: Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10, NIV

Here, again in the ancient wisdom of the Hebrews, is the danger of isolation. When we try to do life alone, we almost always suffer for it. The wisdom writer here lists quite practical things like stumbling and later, keeping warm but the value for Christian growth is the same as well. If we hope to make progress in our Christlikeness, the best way is to journey with some trusted companions. Let's pray that God will bless our mutual journey.

Saturday: A Prayer of Examen

St. Ignatius of Loyola, some 400 years ago, taught the church to pray a simple prayer he called the "Daily Examen." This is a wonderful method of prayerful review that has been

adapted for many settings. Let's try it this week as a "Weekly Examen" prayer. Here are the steps:

- Prepare your heart and mind. Take a few deep breaths and focus on God.
- Review the week with gratitude. Think back through the events of your week, noting the joys and delights.
- Pay attention to your emotions during these events. Talk with God about how you were feeling. Often God uses our emotions to alert us to his work.
- Select a part of your week to pray over. Where were you successful in honoring God? Pray that God will help you to build on this. Where did you fail to honor God? Repent of this and ask God for renewed strength.
- Pray for the events of the next week that God would prepare you to be aware of his presence.

Week Eight

“Covenant Formation Groups: Building a Covenant Together”

Key Takeaway: The creation of a Covenant Formation Group is the means to practice accountable discipleship at Central Church and pursue holiness of heart and life.

Learning Goals:

- Participants will learn how a Covenant Formation Group fits into the Nazarene framework.
- Participants will clearly see the need for the Covenant Formation Group.
- Participants will write a group covenant that will serve the group in the ensuing months.

Catching Up With One Another— (5 minutes) Invite participants to simply spend a few moments of relational time before you begin the session.

Praying for One Another – (3 minutes) If you have a volunteer ready, invite that person to lead the group in an opening prayer. If you haven’t prepared a volunteer, you may ask if anyone feels comfortable leading. If not, simply lead the prayer yourself.

Getting to Know One Another: (5 minutes)

Briefly describe for the group a covenant of which you are currently a part and its level of accountability: low, medium, high. (For instance: A mortgage is a kind of covenant with the bank; A marriage is a covenant between the spouses and God; a teacher’s contract is a kind of covenant with the school system, etc.)

Today’s Session: “Covenant Formation Groups: Building a Covenant Together”

For the past seven weeks, you have begun the journey of a Covenant Formation Group (CFG). Kansas City Central has adopted the term Formation Group to be a broad umbrella under which all of its discipleship emphases are housed. This terminology was selected as it better expressed the church’s efforts to not simply maintain programming, but to have its people formed into the likeness of Christ. This group is distinguished as a Covenant Formation Group so that in the broader publications of Central Church’s discipleship offerings, it may be distinguished as unique.

I. Covenant Formation Groups: A Wesleyan Response for Kansas City Central

(5 minutes)

The specific format of the covenant was chosen as it accurately represents a Wesleyan response to the proposed problem at Central Church. For Wesley, “belief was always connected to actions.” The CFG model is built with an instructional and experiential component in light of this. Wesley scholar Randy

Maddox writes:

Wesley would be the first to insist that careful doctrinal formation alone cannot affect this change. Transformation into Christ's likeness is possible only by God's empowering and renewing grace at work in our lives. That is why Wesley moves from emphasis on doctrine in his diagnostic sermon to insisting that development of real Christians also requires discipline.

Maddox rightly draws this conclusion from Wesley's sermon, *The Great Privilege of Those Born of God*, where Wesley says,

“God does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul re-acts upon God...He first loves us, and manifests himself unto us...He will not continue to breathe into our soul unless our soul breathes toward him again; unless our love, and prayer, and thanksgiving return to him.”

Here is the rationale for Wesley and ultimately the CFG. The grace of God and human responsibility are not polar opposites but rather work together. God's grace and human response are what authentic Christianity looks like. The CFG model attempts to marry these two concepts in a practical expression of discipleship. If Central Church hopes to reverse the impact of nominal Christianity on its parishioners and reinvigorate the pursuit of holiness of heart and life it will need to recommit to this Wesleyan model of grace and response. Covenant Formation Groups are an essential step in the right direction.

To fail in this regard is to place Nazarenes in a kind of parallel with Wesley's observations in 1763.

I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that re-awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer. How much preaching has there been for these twenty years all over Pembrokeshire! But no regular societies, no discipline, no order of connection. And the consequence is that nine in ten of the once awakened are now faster asleep than ever.

The failure to link doctrine with practice was bemoaned by Wesley then and echoes to this day in churches like Kansas City Central. The CFG model attempts to do for post-modern Nazarene's what the class meeting did for 18th century Methodists.

(Allow 2 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: What are your honest emotions as you consider an extended period of time living in accountability with one another?

II. The Experiential Component (2 minutes)

Teaching alone is not sufficient for life change. Wesley built the

Methodists around the affirmation that belief must always connect to actions. In light of this, the participants in the CFG will work together to create a covenant upon which they all agree to hold one another accountable. The covenant will undoubtedly reflect new insights from the weeks of training but may also nuance some older principles which have never been fully embodied by the members. Once the covenant is complete, the experiential portion of the CFG begins, the group members will meet, very much in the fashion of the class meeting, to watch over one another in loving accountability. Like the early Methodists, this simple practice will result in lasting life change for the participants.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Can you think of examples that support the idea that teaching, or knowledge is not enough to initiate change?

Ask: Do you have any Christian practices that you have always struggled to establish in your life that you hope to include in this covenant? Name one for the group.

Rationale for the CFG Experience (5 minutes)

Over the past weeks, we have together completed the instructional portion of the CFG. Now we turn our attention to the experiential portion of the CFG. The experiential component is essential because, as Wesley instinctively knew, practice repeated over time helps to habituate virtue. In other words, what we do repeatedly becomes habit. Not altogether unlike the countless hours invested in their craft by virtuosos or star athletes, the repeated practice of godliness under the loving accountability of others brings about holiness of heart and life. This reality helps to explain the relatively long, by local church programming standards, five-month period of the CFG. It simply takes time to learn new holy habits.

Additionally, the experiential component of the CFG will help us to break the isolationist tendencies of much of modern evangelicalism. The “me and Jesus” mindset of many Christians will initially chafe at the thought of loving accountability, but when the desire for holiness meets with the work of God’s Spirit, loving accountability will reveal itself as the way forward. Just as those who finally decide to lose weight, get in shape, or break an addiction have shown, the power of the group makes a difference.

The CFG helps us to see that accountability is the missing link in the post-modern church and without it, the church’s future is bleak. In this light, it is also apparent that the input of others in an environment like a CFG will help to identify when growth is taking place. Often it requires the perspective of another to give us an unbiased assessment of our growth.

Finally, and most importantly, the CFG model offers built-in accountability. The uniqueness of this model is that it is not contingent upon the theological training of the leader but is instead firmly rooted in the mutually

agreed upon covenant. The covenant orders the session and provides the “curriculum” for each meeting.

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: The phrase, practice makes perfect may not be true. More logically, practice makes permanent. What do you think of this nuance? What are some “permanent” things that you have practiced in your life, both good and bad?

Ask: How do you feel about the assertion that without some form of accountability, the church is in trouble?

The Covenant Writing Process (6 minutes)

(Group Leader: reproduce this section and distribute it to group members along with Appendix 2, a sample covenant)

The concept of Covenant Discipleship was revived by David Lowes Watson for the United Methodist Church in the early 1990’s. In his book, *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability*, he outlines the process of covenant writing. Where Dr. Watson has “traditioned” the general rules of the Methodists in his covenant groups, this project has elected to work from the “Covenant of Christian Conduct” in the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, 2017-2021* as a starting place for every CFG. Using paragraphs 28 through 28.3, the CFG covenant should be written using the following guidelines:

1. The covenant should represent the group’s desire to pursue a “new and holy way of life.” This focus matches perfectly John Wesley's emphasis on holiness of heart and life.
2. The basis for this covenant should be Holy Scriptures.
3. The covenant should, with the help of the Holy Spirit, be careful to avoid all evil and embrace the good in accordance with I Thessalonians 5: 21-22, which says, “Test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.”

Beyond this foundation, the covenant should fall within the following parameters:

1. The covenant should represent the aspirations of the group members but also be a document of grace recognizing that only with the help of the Spirit will the participants be able to live into the covenant. Additionally, people are bound to have good and not so good weeks. Grace should be extended while at the same time encouraging the efforts to keep trying.
2. The covenant in and of itself is not magic. It is, rather, a means of grace in the tradition of the early Methodists. Participants should be

reminded that God will use this means as they cooperate with God in response.

3. A brief preamble to the covenant should be written that grounds the covenant in the work of the Spirit and reminds the group weekly of their common goal.
4. The clauses of the covenant should be agreed upon by all as reasonably attainable on a weekly basis.
5. The number of clauses is not pre-determined but should be set by the group as they consider covering each of them in the allotted one-hour weekly meeting.
6. A conclusion to the covenant should be written to summarize again the groups dependence upon the help of God, and the group's support for one another.
7. The covenant should then be signed by every member and a copy given to each member to keep and refer to often as a reminder of their commitment to grow in holiness of heart and life.

(See appendix 2 for a sample covenant)

(Allow 4 minutes for this discussion)

Ask: Can you already think of some suggestions you have for our covenant? What are they?

Ask: How shall we go about the construction of our covenant?

(**Note:** Some groups may choose to dig in all together right away; others may elect to spend a week in prayer before coming together. The Group Leader should allow as much time as needed for the group to create a covenant that they can all support. It is recommended to follow the sample covenant format. Some groups may struggle with the preamble and conclusion sections. It is acceptable to use the provided preamble and conclusion if necessary.)

Once the group has completed the training and written a covenant upon which all the members agree, it is time to begin the three-month experience of sharing together on the basis of the covenant.

The Three-Month Experience (4 minutes)

Having completed the training and written a mutually agreed upon covenant, the CFG experience should proceed as follows:

- First, group members will gather and spend five minutes in relational

updates.

- The Group Leader will then call the group to order and pray.
- Next the Group Leader will go first and offer her/his assessment of living up to the agreed upon covenant. This will take place as a group member is selected to inquire of the Group Leader's successes or failures in living up to the covenant in a question and answer (catechetical) format. For example, "John, how did it go this week as you tried to live more simply?" Group members will be invited to offer helpful comment.
- The group then proceeds one after the other to go over each part of the agreed upon covenant, assessing her/his successes and failures in living up to the covenant. The Group Leader will ask the questions of each member and facilitate any group comments.
- Once the members have all given their personal assessments, the Group Leader will summarize with observations and close the meeting in prayer.
- It is important that the meetings last no more than one hour so that participants may find it possible to work this gathering into their already busy lives.

Participants in the CFG are binding themselves with both an unfailing God and a supportive community. This "vertical" and "horizontal" relationship is anchored in the Great Commandment where Christians are directed to love God and neighbor, and in a cruciform life anchored in Jesus' cross, itself an expression of the supreme love of God and humanity. May God bless the Covenant Formation Group as means of grace in the twenty-first century Nazarene Church as God blessed the class meeting of the early Methodists.

Weekly Practice: (10 minutes) Depending upon the group's wishes, the weekly practice may include:

1. A week of prayerful reflection on the training sessions before coming together to begin the process of covenant writing.
2. Each member creating a draft of the covenant to compare in the next session.
3. The group meeting in a session outside of the normal time to work together on the covenant. This might be a great opportunity to gather in someone's home for a time of fellowship, refreshments, and then covenant work.

Please take the time to make this determination as a group before dismissing. Be very specific on the expectations for the week.

Prayer: Offer prayers for strength and focus for the group. Offer prayers for any needs of which the group is aware.

Dismiss within the 75 minute window to preserve the trust that these meetings will start and end on time. This discipline will help to keep morale high and participation consistent.

Appendix Five
Participant's Weekly Handouts

Key Takeaway: *Consumerism is a kind of alternate religion in America that challenges our discipleship.*

Learning Goals:

- **Participants will understand the influence of consumerism on church participation.**
- **Participants will identify consumerism in their own lives.**
- **Participants will commit to practical steps which decrease the influence of consumerism in their lives and in church participation.**

Getting to Know One Another: If you had to divulge to this group one *thing* that you tend to have too much of, what would it be and why?

Lesson Highlights:

The Water We Swim In

The Participation Problem

Post-Modernism

The Pull of Consumerism

The Johnson County Selling

Key Takeaway: *The church needs to recover a biblical, historical, and Wesleyan model of discipleship.*

Learning Goals:

- Participants will learn the key moments in the history of discipleship during Jesus' earthly ministry.
- Participants will sense the importance of engaging in the ministry of discipleship in response to God's call.
- Participants will see the importance of John Wesley for the cause of discipleship renewal.

Getting to Know One Another: "What does the phrase, 'You can't see the forest for the trees,' mean? Please share an instance in your life when this was true for you."

Lesson Highlights:

The Puritans, Pietists, and Moravians

John Wesley and the Way Forward

Key Aspects of Wesley and Methodism that Frame Discipleship Renewal

Key Takeaway: *John Wesley's efforts in discipleship and emphasis on holiness reformed 18th century England and mark a path for discipleship renewal in the Nazarene.*

Learning Goals:

- **Participants will hear the call to evangelism and discipleship in modern church.**
- **Participants will understand the importance of the relational element of discipleship.**
- **Participants will learn to identify the roots of Wesley's teaching heritage.**

Getting to Know One Another: If it were possible for you to have dinner with a historical figure, who would it be and why?

Lesson Highlights:

Wesley the Influencer

Wesley the Evangelist

Wesley the Disciple-maker

Nazarene Roots in Wesley

Watching Over One Another in Love

Week Four Participant Guide

Grace Enough: Holiness of Heart and Life and Responsible

Key Takeaway: *John Wesley's theology and his methodology worked together to create a model for disciple making.*

Learning Goals:

- **Participants will understand Wesley's use of the phrase, “Holiness of heart and life” and its meaning.**
- **Participants will learn the key components of “responsible grace.”**
- **Participants will explore the interplay between *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy*.**

Getting to Know One Another: Can you name one or two of the noteworthy holiest people the most holy person you have ever personally known?

Lesson Highlights:

Holiness of Heart and Life

Responsible Grace

Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy

Action Steps

Watching Over One Another in Love

Week Five Participant Guide

From Here to There: John Wesley and the Means of Grace

Key Takeaway: *John Wesley's understanding of the means of grace is critical to the renewal of Nazarenes.*

Learning Goals:

- **Participants will learn the origin of the phrase, “means of grace.”**
- **Participants will understand how Wesley defined the General means of grace.**
- **Participants will be able to define Wesley’s Institutional means of grace.**

Getting to Know One Another: Can you describe a time in your life when you felt God’s presence was unusually present?

Lesson Highlights:

The Origins of the Means of Grace

The Framework of the Means of Grace

The General Means of Grace

The Instituted Means of Grace

Action Steps

Watching Over One Another in Love

Week Six Participant Guide

From Here to There: John Wesley and the Means of Grace

Key Takeaway: *The prudential means of grace gave John Wesley the freedom to adapt and innovate toward his goal of holiness of heart and life.*

Learning Goals:

- **Participants will learn what Wesley meant by using the phrase, "prudential means of grace."**
- **Participants will understand the interplay between Wesley's three categories of the means of grace.**
- **Participants will discover the implications that the prudential means of grace have for the Church of the Nazarene.**

Getting to Know One Another: Can you identify a way that God poured grace into your life that you did not expect?

Lesson Highlights:

The Origins of the Prudential Means of Grace

The Interdependence of the Means of Grace

The Implications of the Prudential Means of Grace

Action Steps

Watching Over One Another in Love

Week Seven Participant Guide

Watching Over One Another in Love: Accountability and Discipleship

Key Takeaway: *One of the missing ingredients in effective discipleship today is loving accountability exhibited in the early Methodist class meeting.*

Learning Goals:

- **Participants will understand Wesley's intentions in “watching over one another in love.”**
- **Participants will learn the format and importance of the class meeting in early Methodism.**
- **Participants will understand how the class meeting is an exemplary and prudent means of grace.**

Getting to Know One Another: What are the most popular expressions of accountability in our culture right now?

Lesson Highlights:

Watching Over One Another in Love

The Early Methodist Class Meeting

The Class Meeting in Wesley's Organizational System

Key and Transferable Components of the Class Meeting to a Nazarene Setting

Action Steps

Watching Over One Another in Love

Week Eight Participant Guide

Covenant Formation Groups: Building a Covenant Together

Key Takeaway: *The creation of a Covenant Formation Group is the means to accountable discipleship at Central Church and pursue holiness of heart and*

Learning Goals:

- **Participants will learn how a Covenant Formation Group fits into the Nazarene framework.**
- **Participants will clearly see the need for the Covenant Formation Group.**
- **Participants will write a group covenant that will serve the group for the ensuing months.**

Getting to Know One Another: Can you name for the group a covenant or covenants you are currently a part and its level of accountability: low, medium, high?

Lesson Highlights:

Covenant Formation Groups: A Wesleyan Response for Lenexa Central

The Experiential Component

Rationale for the Covenant Formation Group Experience

Notes for Writing the Covenant

Action Steps
