Preaching that Leads to Transformation At The North Street Church of Christ in Nacogdoches, Texas

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ABSTRACT

This doctor of ministry thesis presents the results of a project to develop a process whereby the sermon would be enhanced for listeners at the North Street Church of Christ in Nacogdoches, Texas, so that preaching would be more effective in leading to transformation. The theology and methodology of John Wesley were utilized as a lens by which to think about and implement this practice.

The intervention involved a six-week session with a focus group that represented a cross-section of the congregation. Participants in this group were asked to engage in a *lectio divina* exercise on a particular text daily, journal about the experience, listen attentively to the sermon on the same text on Sunday morning, and meet with a group of others who were engaged in the same practices for the purpose of discussion. Group members were to propose ways in which they might be able to implement, in the coming week, what they had learned. Each was encouraged to choose one of those possible implementations and practice it. The following meeting would begin with a discussion of the implementation.

Evaluation of the process revealed that such preparation before the sermon, engagement with others about the sermon, and practicing lessons learned helped to bring about transformation in the lives of the participants. In addition, the process also revealed that the diversity of the group contributed significantly to the learning and growth of the participants. The thesis concludes with suggestions for the elders in how to utilize this process going forward.
Preaching that Leads to Transformation

At The North Street Church of Christ in Nacogdoches, Texas

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the Course

BIBM 725 Project Thesis Seminar

By

Curtis Barbarick

May 2014
This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate’s committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry

____________________________________
Dean of the Graduate School

Date

_______________________________

Thesis Committee

____________________________________
Chair

____________________________________

____________________________________
To Lisa

For your love and support through many years of partnership in ministry

Thank you for all the papers you typed on an actual typewriter and for all the times you proofread other papers. You are the best!
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis addresses the need for a process that will enhance the listeners’ experience of the sermon for the purpose of transformation at the North Street Church of Christ.\(^1\) The goal was to make listeners active in the sermon process through a preparation that adequately allows them to engage the sermon. After hearing the sermon, listeners discussed with one another and then attempted to implement what they learned. The theology and methodology of John Wesley were utilized as a lens by which to think about and implement this practice.

Chapter 1 provides a historical perspective of North Street, giving attention to concepts of transformation at North Street as well as the congregation’s perception of preaching. Chapter 2 provides the theological lens that will guide the project. Chapter 3 lays out the methodology for the project. In it I provide the format for the intervention, the timetable for the intervention, the participants, sessions, and evaluation methods. Chapter 4 examines the effectiveness of the process based on the analysis and interpretation of the data. Chapter 5 notes conclusions and implications of the project and considers the possibilities for future implementation of this process at North Street as well as its use in other contexts. In this chapter I also discuss what I have learned throughout the process.

\(^1\) Hereinafter simply referred to as “North Street.”
Title of the Project

The title of this project is “Preaching That Leads to Transformation at the North Street Church of Christ in Nacogdoches, Texas.” If the decline in religious identity in the United States and the fact that the lifestyles of Christians cannot be greatly distinguished from non-Christians are any indicators, preaching is not making great headway in bringing about transformation in the body of Christ. This project attempted to provide better opportunities for such transformation to occur at North Street. This transformation leads believers into the salvation intended by God and allows them to be the salt and light that Jesus intended.

Ministry Context

The claim to fame of the city of Nacogdoches is that it is the oldest city in Texas. There is great pride in the town’s history and therefore a great respect for history in general. The town hosts a university established in the name of one of the founding fathers of Texas, Stephen F. Austin (SFA). The university provides the primary source of employment and a significant amount of the population. The university also provides for some diversity. Were it not for the university, Nacogdoches would be a blue-collar town made up mainly of ranchers, chicken farmers, and industrial and oil field workers. But with the university the town has a mix of professionals and blue-collar workers.

The congregation reflects this mix. There are a number of professionals within the congregation, some of whom are employed at the university. There are also a number of blue-collar workers employed by a plumbing manufacturer and oil companies. In addition, there are those who raise chickens for Tyson and Pilgrim’s Pride. The town is

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2 The city has an approximate population of 33,000, 13,000 of whom are SFA students.
also ethnically mixed. Sixty-two percent of the population is white, eighteen percent is black, and eighteen percent is Hispanic. There is also a small Asian population. The congregation is primarily made up of white members, but it also has a small number of black members and a small Spanish-speaking congregation. There are no Asian members.

North Street was established in the early 1960s. The group originally met on the west side of town before building the facility on North Street. The group that started the congregation felt disenfranchised by an existing congregation in town because they would not adhere to the non-cooperation perspective. East Texas has been the hub of those who represent the non-cooperation faction of Churches of Christ. An example of this was the re-establishment of the Gospel Guardian in nearby Lufkin by Foy E. Wallace and Fanning Yater Tant in 1949. This perspective, which was seen as narrow and lacking in grace, is still well represented in East Texas today.

In 1966 North Street hired Bill Sherrill to serve as the preaching minister. Sherrill spent a great deal of time focusing on the grace of God. His preaching and the congregation’s acceptance of those who were not welcomed in other Churches of Christ in the area helped the congregation grow and flourish. This atmosphere of acceptance continues today as some drive as far as seventy-three miles to attend North Street because they consider the churches in their area to be too rigid and judgmental. Sherrill continued as the preaching minister until 1999 and remains with the congregation as the family minister as well as an elder.

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Sherrill’s leadership and long tenure helped the congregation maintain stability throughout some difficult times. As a result, the congregation has never split, despite pressures that have come from both the left and the right. Issues regarding marriage and divorce, worship, and attitudes towards those outside of Churches of Christ have all threatened to divide the congregation. Through it all, the congregation has allowed great diversity without being pulled in any direction that would cause division.

North Street sponsors a ministry to students of SFA called the Yellow House. The Yellow House is located next to the campus and ministers to students who are both from Churches of Christ backgrounds as well as from outside of Churches of Christ. However, the Yellow House also receives support from some smaller congregations in East Texas. Because many of the students come from small, rural churches that tend to be more conservative, there has often been conflict among the students as well as conflict from some of those supporting congregations because North Street and the Yellow House would not take a firm stand against the beliefs and practices of those from outside of Churches of Christ. As a result, some of those churches have withdrawn financial support from the Yellow House.

The battles that have been fought over supporting orphan homes, having a kitchen in the church building, and marriage and divorce have often kept North Street from focusing on the goal of becoming transformed people and a transformed church. One would imagine that the preaching of grace would have provided a different trajectory, but this has not necessarily been the case.
Identifying the Problem

The problem of this project is that preaching at North Street lacks effectiveness in leading to transformation in members of the congregation. There are at least two obstacles to transformation through preaching at North Street. The first is theological and the second is structural. In terms of theology, there are indications that the teaching on grace has led some to imagine that transformation is either unnecessary or unimportant. Sherrill himself said that he witnessed this effect. Whereas there was a period in the church’s history that any immoral behavior was met with harsh treatment and judgment, such behavior now is often met with indifference or acceptance. Such cheapening of God’s grace\(^5\) seems to be a trend not only within Churches of Christ, but among evangelical churches as well.\(^6\)

In this context orthodoxy is often emphasized over orthopraxy. For instance, a congregation may exercise tolerance for those in its midst who are known in the community to have acted in unethical or immoral ways, but be very strict on the teaching of baptism or *a cappella* singing. These practices create a false dichotomy between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Orthodoxy is somehow disconnected from the lives of church members and limited to public assemblies.

Within Churches of Christ in general, and North Street in particular, there seems to be a static understanding of salvation that allows one to diminish the importance of transformation. Salvation is often understood as getting into heaven after death. With this

\(^5\) Dietrich Bonhoeffer is the one known for making popular the term “cheap grace” in the twentieth century. While speaking of this same trend in his own day, John Wesley referred to it as “nominal Christianity.” For more on Bonhoeffer, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1959).

assumption, the understanding is that what one needs to do is to meet certain requirements so that salvation will be achieved. While these requirements were once seen to be very exacting, cheap grace allows them now to be almost non-existent. The result is that transformation, while valuable, is not necessary for salvation.

However, it would be unfair to suggest that this attitude represents all or even a majority of the membership. Some find transformation to be an important aspect of their faith, but the congregation has no systematic way to help people to grow in this regard. This is the second obstacle. The sermon is often understood to be the primary way that one is taught about becoming like Christ, but members have no framework by which they can take what they have learned in the sermon and build upon it so as to be transformed.

In a fellowship that has placed great stress on being analytical, we have assumed that if everyone received the proper information, it would be implemented. The problem, it was assumed, was that listeners did not have good information. In this environment preaching has been about imparting information and listening has been a passive exercise. Listeners come to the sermon unprepared to hear the word of God. While the text of the sermon to be preached is often read during the worship service, the listeners have typically not read the text themselves before arriving for worship. This approach has appealed to one type of learning style and one spiritual type above others, thus limiting other ways of learning and being formed.

In this framework, any expectation for transformation as a result of the sermon is strictly the responsibility of the individual. Individuals listen to the sermon and choose to make adjustments in their lives with no input from other listeners. While communal
discernment is often thought to be valuable in a Bible class situation, there is no structure for it to have a place in relationship to the sermon. This approach misses out on the rich contribution that fellow believers may make to the transformation of one another.

**The Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project was to implement a process that would enhance the listeners’ experience of the sermon for the purpose of transformation at North Street. The challenge of preaching so that listeners will hear has been the constant conversation of homiletics. Many have attempted to address the issue by asking the preacher to think differently about the delivery of the sermon. In this case the attempted change has focused on the preacher. These approaches have addressed the style of preaching or the *pathos, ethos* and *logos* of the preacher. In more recent times others have turned their attention toward the listener. How do listeners actually listen to the sermon? Fred Craddock advocated a turn to the listener when he introduced the new homiletic in *As One Without Authority.*

Others have followed Craddock in this turn. Allen Burris addressed this in his 2006 doctor of ministry project. Burris involved listeners in forming the sermon. Both Burris and Craddock, however, turned toward the listener so that the preacher could shape the sermon to more adequately address the needs of the listener. In other words, in

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7 Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 1971).
turning towards the listener, the focus continued to be on adjustments made by the preacher.

This project attempted to focus on the listener of the sermon so that a turn toward the listener is primarily toward the listener. This turn sought to provide a framework in which the listener is equipped and empowered to make the adjustment that will enhance the effectiveness of the sermon. This turn asked, how can the listener be more actively involved in the sermon and in the application of the sermon? How can listeners make use of personal devotional time to prepare to hear the sermon? How might it shape listeners if they came together after the sermon and engaged in communal discernment? How might the practice of such things lead to transformation? How might all of this help the listener to better engage the sermon on Sunday? How might such enhancement lead to better, more meaningful, and more lasting transformation?

The project sought to provide a framework in which all of this might take place. In practice, listeners were asked to make adjustments by engaging in *lectio divina* with the text before they came to the sermon. They then met with a small group for a discussion of what they experienced in the *lectio divina* as well as the sermon. This concluded with an action that each member of the group attempted to enact in the coming week that would work towards transformation. At the beginning of the next group meeting, members discussed their experience with their action item. Although the sermons preached during the intervention focused on the subject of grace, this subject was not necessary for my project. Any topic or text could have been addressed using this framework and could have potentially helped fulfill the goal of transformation.
I used John Wesley as the theological lens for this project because Wesley was a preacher who was interested in transformation and who made great use of small groups to meet this goal. While “transformation” is not the language utilized by John Wesley, it appears to have been Wesley’s intent. In essence Wesley was doing in his own day what I sought to do with the North Street Church. In addition, Wesley also struggled to combat theological perspectives in his own day that seemed to undermine transformation. He too noticed that an over-emphasis on God’s sovereignty and grace led many people to be Christians in name only.

**Basic Assumptions**

This project was built upon several assumptions. The first is that the sermon is not adequately helping members of North Street to lead transformed lives. This assumption is based on my observation of the lack of significant change in church members after more than twenty years of preaching. Thus while this project explored implications for North Street, the problem is by no means limited to North Street. The second assumption is that the sermon can be effective for transformation in the lives of those that hear it. The third assumption is that better possibilities exist for hearing the sermon and for transformation to occur when the listeners prepare themselves to hear it, discuss the lesson with others, and then find practical ways for implementation.

**Definitions**

There are several terms utilized in this project that must be clarified. Transformation means being formed into the image of Christ.\(^9\) This was essentially what Wesley was after as well, but he tended to use terms such as “Holiness” or “Perfection.”

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\(^9\) See Rom 8:29 and Gal 4:19.
The term _lectio divina_ may be defined or interpreted in several ways. In the group exercises, I used the definitions for each part of the process provided by Corrine Ware. Ware defines _lectio divina_ as a way of reading Scripture that opens it “by calling forth our ability to experience it in different modes.”

The model for journaling is provided by Adele Calhoun and this project adopts her definition. “Journaling is a tool for reflecting on God’s presence, guidance, and nurture in daily comings and goings.” Small group ministries have developed in some churches striving to nurture spiritual growth in their members through Bible study, prayer, and mutual encouragement. Those church ministries are often referred to as “home groups.”

**Delimitations**

There are two delimitations to this project. The first is that a focus group of people who are consistent in their attendance on Sunday mornings was assembled to assist in this project. Delimiting the project in this way has the downside of not addressing how this project might impact those who are sporadic in their attendance. However, so as to have a reliable set to measure the effectiveness of the project, this delimitation was a necessity. There is no good way to measure the effectiveness of the project if members of the group are not fully engaged. Therefore the project was delimited to those consistent in their Sunday morning worship attendance so that they would actually experience the sermon throughout the project intervention.

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10 Corrine Ware, _Discover Your Spiritual Type_ (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1995), 101. Also, see Eugene Peterson, _Eat This Book_ (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

11 Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, _Spiritual Disciplines Handbook_ (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 56.
The second delimitation is that the exercise involved only four spiritual practices among many options (*lectio divina*, communal discernment, journaling, and implementation). Any number of other spiritual exercises could have been utilized, such as silence, sabbath, or simplicity, but these were chosen because they contribute specifically to the experience of being transformed through the sermon.

**Limitations**

There are two noticeable limitations to this project. The first is that, due to the brevity of the project, only the short-term impact of the exercise can be measured. I can only project what I think might be the long-term benefits. The project assumes that spiritual growth develops over time and that one generally cannot measure the extent of that growth in the short period that this project covered.

The second limitation is that the project, as it is currently framed, will not enhance the sermon for those who do not participate in the spiritual exercises or do not attend Sunday morning worship on a regular basis. North Street may choose to adopt this model for home groups in the future, but those who do not involve themselves in these groups or those who do not regularly attend worship so as to hear the sermon will not experience the transformation that is desired.

**Conclusion**

This model has great potential for helping those who seek growth in Christ and for enhancing the sermon experience for members of the North Street body. It takes full advantage of the varied learning styles and spiritual types that are present within the congregation. It also calls for more responsibility on the part of the listener when hearing
the sermon. Finally, it allows one to learn by doing, which is foundational to most learning in life.
CHAPTER II
THEOLOGICAL LENS
JOHN WESLEY

Before moving into a discussion of Wesley’s theology, we must reflect on Wesley’s life, primarily those aspects that shaped his theology. One’s theology cannot be distinguished fully from one’s experiences, place in history, familial and social environment, and religious heritage. No one is born into or lives in a vacuum. In addition, one’s personality plays a role in how one’s theology develops and by what method one chooses to pursue such.

The Life of John Wesley

John Wesley was born in June 1703 to Samuel and Susanna Wesley. His father was the rector in Epworth in North Lincolnshire, England. The family was Anglican, a religious heritage that had close kinship with Roman Catholics but little love for the papacy. There were, however, many other Protestants in England with whom Wesley would have many dealings, primarily those of the Reformed tradition.

Being raised in the home of a clergyman, Wesley’s spiritual education and move to serve in the clergy would seem likely to have come from his father, but it was his mother who provided the most significant training for John and his siblings. His mother’s deep faith as well as her insistence on discipline seemed to have a great impact upon John. As an adult he wrote to her often, conversing about spiritual matters.
In 1720 Wesley began his university studies at Christ Church, Oxford. By 1725 he was considering holy orders. He visited a friend to discuss the matter. This friend convinced him of the importance of holiness in his life. This set Wesley on his path. In that year he read *The Imitation of Christ* and about the same time he began reading Jeremy Taylor’s *Rule and Exercise of Holy Living and Holy Dying.*

1 As a result Wesley was convicted. Outler observed that Wesley had two conversions, of which this was the first.2

On September 19, 1725, Wesley was ordained a deacon. On September 22, 1728 he was ordained as a priest. Sometime around 1729 he read William Law’s *Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life.*3 Law convinced him that the law of God was life giving. This led Wesley on a search for holiness via obedience to God’s law. In 1729 Wesley joined his brother Charles and William Morgan for study and religious conversation. The group sought to take holy living seriously and engaged in study and service.4 Some charged them with being too strict. The charge was not without merit. As a result critics attributed various names to the group, including “The Holy Club,” “Godly Club,” “Bible Moths,” “Bible Bigots,” and “Supererogation Men.”5

Though he received a substantial education at Oxford, Wesley never actually completed his bachelor of divinity degree. The reasons for this are unclear.6 However, as

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6 One contributing factor was his belief that his Oxford fellows and dons were hypocrites. See John Wesley, Sermons IV (115-151), ed. Albert Outler, vol. 4 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of*
Maddox notes, his education should not be minimized. He was considered highly trained. The B.D. of that day was more demanding than the M.Div. of today. The B.D. was taken after the M.A. and the only higher degree was the doctor of divinity.  

Many have not recognized John Wesley as a major theologian, primarily because he did not attempt to synthesize his work in a systematic way. Albert Outler sought to redeem Wesley from the dungeons of the forgotten, arguing that Wesley was not a speculative theologian, but was rather a “folk theologian.” His primary concern was people. Unless he was attempting to defend himself, Wesley’s writings were generally for the purpose of instructing his lay preachers and fellow believers. He did not write for the academy and had little interest in speculation.

This concern for people motivated Wesley to accept an invitation to work as a missionary in Georgia in 1735. His experience there was less than spectacular, much of which was his own doing. However, the great value of this endeavor for Wesley was his experience with the Moravians that he met. Wesley was impressed with the peace they experienced during the storms at sea and developed a friendship with them, taking a keen interest in their spiritual lives. One of the Moravian leaders, August Spangenberg, helped

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*Randy L. Maddox, Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 15.*

*Outler commented that “Christian eggheads have never loved him, nor was he fond of us.” Albert Outler, “Towards a Re-Appraisal of John Wesley as a Theologian,”* Perkins School of Theology Journal *(Winter 1961): 7.*

*Ibid. 40-54.*

*Collins, A Real Christian, 43-53.*
challenge Wesley’s own faith. After John Wesley confessed Jesus as the savior of the world, Spangenberg said, “Yes, but do you know that he has saved you?”

This question continued to roll around in Wesley’s mind for some time and would not be fully answered until he experienced God as his Savior at Aldersgate. This took place on May 24, 1738, after he returned to England. In his *Journal* Wesley wrote,

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

This second conversion, of which Outler spoke, set Wesley on a new course from which he never retreated, and became the defining event for his pastoral theology. Although there have been those who speak of the early, middle, and late John Wesley, Wesley himself argued that his theology did not change after 1738.

There are three contributing factors to John’s theology and methodology that have significance for this thesis. The first is the emphasis on shaping the will and the importance of transformation that Wesley learned from his mother and others. The second is his time spent with the Moravians and his experience at Aldersgate, which helped Wesley see that God is the primary mover in transformation. The third is the structure his mother instilled in him that helped John to develop a methodology that fit his theology.

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11 Ibid. 41-42.
13 Maddox, 20
The Theology of John Wesley

What follows is an attempt to systematize what remained unsystematized for Wesley due to the primacy of his pastoral concerns. The focus of Wesley’s theology resided in his concern that people would experience the love of God and that this love would transform them into the holy people that God desired them to be. He was very disturbed about what he termed “nominal Christianity.” Wesley used this term to refer to a watered-down faith that allowed people to be no more holy than their heathen neighbors. Such faith, for Wesley, was no faith at all. Thus he vigorously sought to help people attain the perfection to which they were called. While Wesley’s theology was not necessarily systematic, it does cohere in a way that provides a constructive foundation. Following this exploration of his theology is a discussion of the implications of Wesley’s theology for transformation among members of North Street.

Prolegomena

A common way to speak of sources of theology for Wesley is to refer to his “quadrilateral.” While Wesley spoke of four sources for his theology, he never used this term to refer to his sources, nor did he consider those sources equal. The term “quadrilateral” was coined by Albert Outler as he attempted to explicate Wesley’s theological approach. For Wesley, Scripture was the ultimate authority and therefore trumped all other sources.

While not a biblicist, Wesley took Scripture seriously and literally. Along with the reformers, Wesley was not one for the allegorical method. He studied the New Testament

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16 Maddox, 36.
in Greek and consulted the best scholars for his studies in the Old Testament. Wesley considered Scripture to be the authority for doctrine, speech, and worship. Most importantly, he considered it to be the authority for life.

Wesley believed that Scripture would bring people to an awareness of their spiritual bondage. Since Scripture was inspired by the Spirit, the Spirit would use Scripture to convict of sin (John 16:8). Therefore, those who sought to enter the kingdom would do well to let it govern their lives.

Let us take care that our whole heart and life be conformable thereto; that it be the constant rule of all our tempers, all our words, and all our actions. So shall we preserve in all things the testimony of a good conscience toward God; and when our course is finished, we too shall be “carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom.”

However, while Scripture was the primary authority, Wesley was not so naïve as to believe that Scripture was easily read and comprehended by every person in every context. He understood that people live in contexts, have experiences that contribute to their understanding of Scripture, have reasoning abilities, and that the church has a tradition. Therefore reason, tradition, and experience served as sources for him as well.

Reason, while not equal to Scripture, might be considered a close second for Wesley. He was a child of the Enlightenment and a strong advocate of reason. Maddox argues that Wesley spoke of Scripture and reason together more than he spoke of Scripture alone. In regard to reason, he was fighting a battle on two fronts. The first was against those who undervalued reason, namely those he called “enthusiasts.” These he

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18 Maddox, 40.
deemed to be hopeless because rather than engage in a reasonable discussion, they would
discount any reasoned discourse as “carnal reason.”

The second opponents were those who overvalued reason, namely those such as
Hobbes or ones inclined to his position. To these Wesley pointed out that one cannot
know of a spiritual world unless God makes it known. Reason is merely a dim light.¹⁹
Neither can one have faith, love of God, hope, or happiness. These come only through the
gift of God, which is his revelation.²⁰

However, it would be wrong to conclude that Wesley believed that Scripture
could stand without reason. Reason was needed to rightly interpret Scripture. In response
to the question regarding the value of reason, Wesley declared, “Is it not reason (assisted
by the Holy Ghost) which enables us to understand what Holy Scriptures declare
concerning the being and attributes of God?”²¹ Reason is the “candle of the Lord” to
guide our understanding of Scripture.²²

While Wesley held Scripture up as the primary source of theology, he seemed to
think that certain quarters of the church rightly interpreted Scripture. These
interpretations are what are normally classified as “tradition.”²³ He alluded to these as
what he was taught as a boy as well as what he and the others in his society held to at
Oxford. These traditions included the primitive fathers, the primitive church, the three

²¹ Ibid. 592.
²² Ibid, 599.
²³ It should be noted that the term “tradition” is often understood to mean interpretations that have
been positively valued. Although Wesley valued these interpretations, this terminology held a more
negative connotation in Wesley’s day.
creeds, and the doctrines of the Church of England, which Wesley considered to be the most scriptural national church in the world.\textsuperscript{24}

Wesley believed that the church digressed significantly beginning with Constantine.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore, the early church (the Ante-Nicene church) was that which Wesley held dear and thought closest to biblical Christianity.\textsuperscript{26} Although he was interested in the doctrine of the early church, his concern for doctrine was whether it led to holiness. In \textit{A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity}, Wesley spoke of the character of the earliest Christians and then asked, “What is real genuine Christianity? Whether we speak of it as a principle in the soul or as a scheme or system of doctrine, Christianity, taken in the latter sense, is that system of doctrine that describes the character above recited.”\textsuperscript{27}

Experience was helpful for Wesley in that it supplemented what Scripture had to say. In a letter to Ann Loxdale, Wesley wrote, “By experience, the strongest of all arguments, you have been once and again convinced that salvation from inbred sin is received by simple faith, and by plain consequence in a moment.”\textsuperscript{28} Wesley’s point was that Scripture teaches us something and our experience proves it to be true. However, should experience contradict Scripture, Wesley would revert to Scripture as his authority.

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Wesley, “On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel,” \textit{Works}, 3:590.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 2:462-63.
\item \textsuperscript{26} An \textit{Address to the Clergy} in The Wesley Center Online, http://wesley.nmu.edu/john-wesley/an-address-to-the-clergy/. Also see Letter to James Hutton (Nov. 27, 1738) in \textit{Letters} (both June 24, 2013).
\item \textsuperscript{28} Letter to Ann Loxdale (July 12, 1782). \textit{Letters}, (accessed June 25, 2013).
\end{itemize}
As with tradition, Wesley’s interest in experience was whether it was in accord with the holy life that was taught in Scripture.

As one can see, Scripture held primacy of place in Wesley’s theology. Therefore, to speak of a “quadrilateral” may be misleading. As Maddox notes, “Wesley’s so-called ‘quadrilateral’ of theological authorities could more adequately be described as a unilateral rule of Scripture within a trilateral hermeneutic of reason, tradition, and experience.”

None of this, however, happened within any methodological framework, but arose as Wesley dealt with specific situations. In each of these situations Wesley was attempting to provide some direction in holiness.

God

There are many attributes of God, but for Wesley the reigning attribute is the love of God. It is from this attribute that God sought to redeem fallen humanity and transform us into the children we were intended to be. Therefore, his love moved him to send his son to die so that we could take on the image of Christ. In his New Testament notes on 1 John 4:8, Wesley wrote concerning God that it is this “attribute that sheds an amiable glory on all his other perfections.”

Wesley sought to give this attribute great attention in light of the many Calvinists he repeatedly encountered in England. He was greatly disturbed by the teachings of Calvinism because he deemed them to undermine the love of God. For Wesley, such

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29 Maddox, 46.
doctrines made God out to be the author of sin and worse than the devil. How could a God of love cause people to sin and then hold them accountable for that sin? This could not be so!

It is not as though Wesley did not accept the premise that God is sovereign, for he did. However, when the sovereignty of God was made the reigning attribute, it then led to the doctrine of predestination, a doctrine that Wesley found most distasteful. He encountered this doctrine often among the Calvinists in England and found predestination to be problematic in several ways. It destroys the comfort of religion, destroys our zeal for good works, has the tendency to overthrow the whole of Christian revelation, and makes revelation contradict itself. Wesley considered predestination to be a doctrine full of blasphemy.

Another concern was that predestination tends to undermine one’s yearning for and efforts at becoming holy. Since, according to the Calvinists, all work is of God, humans do not and cannot do anything towards their salvation and therefore towards their holiness. People are either predestined or they are not, and nothing they do for good or ill will change that. For Wesley this too easily led to antinomianism. Thus he sought to attack the teachings of Calvinism as often as he had the opportunity. God’s sovereignty could not be made to overthrow the free will of humans.

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32 Ibid. 555-557.
Humanity

According to Scripture, God created humans in his image (Gen. 2:27). In what sense were they like God? For Wesley humans were made like God in love. In speaking of humanity before the fall, Wesley wrote, “love even then filled his heart; it reigned in him without rival.”34 We were made to reflect the love of God. “As God is love,” wrote Wesley, “so man, dwelling in love, dwelt in God, and God in him. God made him to be an ‘image of his own eternity,’ an incorruptible picture of the God of glory.”35

It appears axiomatic for Wesley that love entails liberty. Otherwise, humans would be no more capable of serving their creator than a piece of earth is able to do so.36 Without liberty they could not have been capable of virtue or holiness because they could not have chosen such.37 One cannot choose to love or practice virtue unless one is free to do so. Therefore, for humans to be beings who would love like God, they must be free to do so.

Wesley referred to the image of God in three ways. The first is the natural, which involves the spiritual nature and the immortality of the soul. It includes understanding, freedom of will, and various affections. The second is political. In the same way that God relates to creation, in that he has dominion over it, so humanity is given dominion. The third is moral. Wesley considered this to be the chief way in which humans were made in

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37 Ibid.
the image of God. This entails righteousness, holiness, love, justice, mercy, truth, and purity.  

In Western theology the prevalent story was one in which humans used the self-determination that God gave them and chose, through pride, to go their own way. This resulted in a loss of the ability to choose. Humans had no choice but to sin because sin had so thoroughly corrupted their nature. The end result of this was separation from God and death. The goal was to get back into the perfect state in which God had created them.

In the East, however, the story was told differently. First, humans were considered to have been created innocent, but not complete. Humans were given a dynamic nature that would continue to develop with God over time. The East drew a distinction between the “image” and “likeness” of God (Gen. 1:26). The “image” was the human potential for life with God, while the “likeness” was the progressive realization of that potential.

What was lost in the fall was the “likeness,” but not the “image.” That is, human intellect was so weakened that we could not attain the “likeness” of God by our own efforts. The East rejected the notion that we all inherit the guilt of our parents. Instead, people are guilty only when they choose to imitate their parents. The second result of the fall was death, the corruption of human life, and the dominion that these play in our lives. The Eastern writers rejected the idea that the fall deprives us of all grace and destroys our ability to choose. While our ability to choose has been seriously damaged, it has not been destroyed.  

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While Collins emphasizes that Wesley held all three of the images of God (natural, political, and moral), Maddox argues that Wesley primarily paid attention to only two, the natural and moral. These he equated with the Eastern distinction between “image” (natural) and “likeness” (moral). Wesley did not adopt the language of the Eastern writers, but maintained his own distinctions of the image of God. While the Eastern writers maintained that sin had only tainted the moral nature and not totally destroyed it, Wesley took the position of Western writers that it had been totally destroyed. However, Wesley maintained that God renewed human free will by his grace so that humans could once again choose God.

Humans exercised their freedom and chose to do other than the desire of God, which resulted in the fall. Western theology typically sees the root of the fall in human pride. For Wesley, pride was the cause of a fall, but not the fall of humans. It was the cause of the fall of Lucifer (variously referred to as Satan or the devil). He was self-tempted, thinking too highly of himself. The fall of humans, on the other hand, was not the result of pride, but of unbelief.

Wesley doubted whether humans could have chosen evil, knowing it to be evil. Instead, they were deceived into mistaking evil for good. Whereas Satan knew the difference and tempted himself to follow his pride, humans were tempted by the devil to believe the devil rather than God. Humans, beginning with Eve, trusted the devil more

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41 Maddox, 68.
than God and gave in. She then brought her husband along. This unbelief then led to pride.43

In his notes on Hebrews 3:12, Wesley wrote, “Unbelief is the parent of all evil, and the very essence of unbelief lies in departing from God, as the living God—the fountain of all our life, holiness, happiness.”44 This was not true for Adam and Eve only, but for all of humanity. The reversal of this unbelief promotes faith in humans, not God.45

Sin

How was sin passed on to us from our first parents? One explanation for this is that the entire body and soul is transmitted from our parents. This is called “traducianism.” Augustine promoted this idea, but it was rejected in the Roman Church by the fifth century because it sees the soul and body as separate. An alternative, the “creationist” explanation, says that the body was corrupt and that the soul, upon entering the corrupt body, also became corrupt. Luther, being a good Augustinian, rejected this and returned to “traducianism.”

Reformed theology took a different approach. Borrowing from Augustine’s understanding of Romans 5:12, the Reformed tradition argued that all sinned in Adam. In other words, Adam is the federal head for all of humanity. This idea coalesced well with the Reformed emphasis on the juridical justification of depravity. In this model, Adam’s guilt and penalty are passed on to the rest of humanity. Eastern Christianity, on the other hand, read Romans 5:12 differently. Eastern Christians read the passage to say that the

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43 Ibid. 477.
result of Adam’s sin was not the guilt of sin, but death. Mortality debilitated human nature.\textsuperscript{46}

Initially, Wesley said that he was unconcerned about how sin was transmitted to the remainder of humanity after Adam. “The fact I know, both by Scripture and by experience. I know it is transmitted; but how it is transmitted I neither know nor desire to know.”\textsuperscript{47} It was not completely true that Wesley did not care because he made allusions to his opinion in other places.\textsuperscript{48} It is more likely that he was unsure of his opinion.

Wesley altered his position on the matter over the years. In 1738 he advocated the Reformed position. However, after he was challenged regarding the inconsistency of that position with the rest of his theology, Wesley moved towards the “creationism” explanation. Before long, however, he returned to the place of having no definitive position. Finally, in 1762 Wesley arrived at the “traducian” position, with the help of Henry Woolner’s \textit{The True Originale of the Soule.}\textsuperscript{49} In 1782 Wesley published this in the \textit{Arminian Magazine}.\textsuperscript{50}

If humans inherit the sin of Adam, does this mean that children are born in sin? The “traducian” position held this to be the case; thus infants were baptized shortly after birth. On one hand, Wesley seemed to hold this view. According to Wesley, children are not innocent; they deserve to suffer.\textsuperscript{51} However, he also argued that “children ‘shall not die for the iniquity of their fathers.’” No, not eternally, I believe none ever did, or ever

\textsuperscript{46} Maddox, 75-81.
\textsuperscript{47} Wesley, Letter to Dr. John Robertson (Sept. 24, 1753), \textit{Letters}, (accessed June 27, 2013).
\textsuperscript{48} Maddox, 78.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid. 78-79.
will, die eternally, merely for the sin of our first father.”\textsuperscript{52} Despite his understanding that humans are born into sin, Wesley continued to affirm that “none ever was or can be a loser but by his own choice.”\textsuperscript{53}

Maddox argues that the primary influence was the Eastern writers,\textsuperscript{54} while Collins finds Wesley to be more eclectic in forming his theology.\textsuperscript{55} This may be a disagreement of degrees because both admit to an Eastern influence and both recognize that Wesley also drew from other sources. That he was eclectic is demonstrated nowhere better than in his understanding of humanity and sin. At one moment Wesley puts on the Reformed hat of Adam as the federal head, then puts on his Augustinian hat of fallen humanity, then shifts to his Orthodox hat of sin as sickness, and finally dons his Arminian hat to speak of free will.

However, while Wesley did discuss the origin of sin, he focused more on the corruption than the guilt. In this way he aligned himself more with the Eastern tradition,\textsuperscript{56} but he continued to integrate the thinking of others as it fit his primary concern: that the sovereignty of God did not suggest that God was the author of sin and that it did not negate human responsibility in becoming holy.

However, while Wesley was careful to protect God from accusations of causing humans to sin, and while he wanted to give emphasis to human free will, he remained steadfast in his affirmation that sin had wholly corrupted humanity and that humanity

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid. 307.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Wesley, “God’s Love to Fallen Man,” \textit{Works}, 2:434.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Maddox, 23.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Collins, \textit{Theology}, 4. Collins refers to Wesley as a “conjunctive theologian” because Wesley cannot be pigeonholed into Calvinist, pietist, Eastern or other hole of theological perspective simply because he borrows from all of them and develops his own.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Maddox, 81.
\end{thebibliography}
could not escape its grip. “Hence, there is in the heart of every child of man, an inexhaustible fund of ungodliness and unrighteousness, so deeply and strongly rooted in the soul, that nothing less than almighty grace can cure it.”

Salvation

If humans were incapable of removing themselves from the grip of sin, then an act of God was in order. Wesley spoke of this act of God not merely as grace, but as prevenient grace. Wesley did not coin the term, but he did use it in a manner that was divergent from others, particularly those in the Reformed tradition. Those of Reformed background used the term in reference to the sovereignty of God, while Wesley focused more on the love of God.

The difference lies in the understanding of the problem. If sin is considered a violation of a sovereign, then mercy or pardon is necessary. If, however, sin is understood to be a sickness in need of healing, then the power of a physician to heal is necessary. While Calvin typically used terms such as pardon and mercy to speak of grace, Eastern writers primarily spoke of grace in terms of healing. Wesley, always the eclectic, seemed to utilize both equally.

He often made use of the theme of healing to speak of God’s work in humanity. When speaking of the nature of religion, he said, “It is θεραπεία ψυχῆς, God’s method of healing a soul which is thus diseased.” This was Wesley’s approach early in his career but, according to Maddox, during his middle years Wesley moved more towards speaking of grace as pardon. Then, in his later years, he returned to the theme of healing. This

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57 Wesley, “The Deceitfulness of the Human Heart,” Works, 4:156.
58 Maddox, 84-85.
movement back and forth demonstrates Wesley’s willingness to incorporate various ways of thinking about God’s work in the world provided that they did not undermine the primary concerns already discussed.

Maddox also notes that Wesley often equates grace with love. In this light, grace and sin are both understood in relational terms. The resolution of the results of sin, death and the corruption of humanity was that God, who is love, enters back into the life of humans so that his presence heals the corruption and overcomes the power of death. This is a clear reflection of Eastern thinking. Thus while Wesley is more than willing to utilize terms and concepts found within his own Anglican heritage, the broader Protestant heritage, and even the Catholic heritage, those were always subsumed under his understanding that God is love and that he acts in love. The Eastern way of thinking about grace as healing fit this nicely.

Wesley used the term prevenient grace in two ways. The first is narrow, describing all degrees of grace that come before justifying and sanctifying grace. In this he was following the Arminians of his day, arguing that grace provides illumination, which then makes humans responsible. In his sermon On Working Out Your Own Salvation Wesley wrote, “Everyone has some measure of light, some faint glimmering ray, which sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world.” The long and short of this is that no one is without grace. Those who sin are simply not using the grace that they possess.

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60 Maddox, 86.
62 Ibid.
How is it that we receive this grace? The above citation tells us that Wesley believed it was given to every person who comes into the world. While some may call it a natural conscience, Wesley resisted this thinking, insisting that it is the very illumination of God. It is preventing grace. Humans are utterly destitute without the action of God. Whereas we were unable, as a result of the fall, to know right from wrong, by his grace God implanted in us a conscience so that we do know right from wrong. From there we are responsible to act on that which God has given us.

This thought leads us to the second sense of prevenient grace, which involves the prior work of God and human response.63 God’s grace restored our ability to choose. This allows us to hear God and respond to him.64 Therefore, Wesley can also speak of prevenient grace as a cooperation with God, or as is it is sometimes called, synergism. While God bestowed his grace in a way that humans can seemingly not resist, Wesley is clear that humans can and have resisted God’s grace.65 Therefore, salvation comes as a result of an act of God, but requires cooperation and participation by believers.

Wesley believed that those who accepted God’s grace and chose to cooperate with the grace of God would receive salvation. What precisely did Wesley mean by salvation? He spoke of salvation as a present possession, instead of the idea commonly imagined by many today (and in his own day as well) of going to heaven when we die. Wesley was insistent that “It is not a blessing that lies on the other side of death; or, as we usually

63 Ibid. 206.
64 Ibid. “What is Man (Ps. 8:4),” 4:204.
speak, in the other world . . . it is not something at a distance: it is a present thing; a blessing which, through the free mercy of God, ye are now in possession of.”

This approach for Wesley meant much more than an escape from hell. It is a change of a person’s life in the present that extends into the future. It is “a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.” For Wesley, salvation and holiness are synonymous terms.

Wesley’s holistic view of salvation was that salvation amounts to becoming what we were intended to be in the beginning.

Wesley did not intend to discount the future reward when he spoke of salvation. He simply did not wish to have followers of Christ pushing off their holiness until another day. If holiness is the best life, the life God intended, we should grasp it now. Therefore, Wesley thought about salvation in three phases: pardon, which is the beginning of salvation; holiness, which is the continuation of salvation; and heaven, which is the completion of salvation.

This understanding raised a significant question for Wesley: If holiness is to be equated with salvation, is salvation/holiness attained instantaneously or gradually? In Western traditions salvation is primarily thought of as an instantaneous event. People will speak of being “saved” on a particular day. This has its foundation in a judicial

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68 Ibid. 3.
69 Once again Wesley diverges from the Eastern writers who assumed that we are not going back but that we are ever going forward.
70 Maddox, 143.
understanding of the atonement. Pardon is received in a moment, whether that moment is when one is baptized or when one makes a confession of faith.

Meanwhile, in Eastern thought, salvation is conceived as more of a process. If sin is thought of as a disease and salvation as healing, then this healing naturally takes place over time. In fact, Eastern writers imagined that it would begin in this life and continue in the next, going on into infinity because God is infinite. Therefore, we are progressively being saved.

On this score Wesley integrated Eastern and Western ideas. He spoke of salvation as happening in an instant, but he also spoke of the process of change that takes place so that one may speak of “being saved.” For instance, in *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Wesley stated that in the very moment people accepted that Christ died for them, loved them, and gave himself for them, they were pardoned. He went on to say that “as soon as his Pardon or Justification is witnessed to him by the Holy Ghost, he is saved.”

However, as soon as Wesley made this statement he continued, “From that Time (unless he make Shipwreck of the Faith) Salvation gradually increases in his soul.”

Again, Wesley believed that there would come a moment when a person would finally be free of sin, though that person might not detect it in themselves. Yet he also believed that there would be a process leading up to this state of being, in much the same

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73 Ibid.
way humans mature physically. Wesley freely admitted that he spoke of salvation/holiness in terms of both an instantaneous event and a gradual process of growth, but was confident that one could do so without contradiction.

No doubt Wesley felt there was no contradiction because he imagined the process began in a moment, then grew. It would continue to grow until it came to the point where the person would be made perfect. However, even then Wesley could imagine a person growing after reaching perfection. He also discussed the possibility of growth after death.

For Wesley, whether one grew slowly, quickly, or at all, was, in some measure, dependent upon that person. God provided the grace for the growth, but because grace calls for cooperation from us, we could choose to stunt our growth or even bring it to a complete halt. Wesley enjoyed citing Augustine on this matter, given that Augustine represented a more deterministic perspective. “He that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves.” Wesley always left open the possibility that people could lose the salvation they had gained.

80 Wesley suggests this in several places, but is very explicit in his notes on 1 Cor. 9:27: “This single text may give us a just notion of the scriptural doctrine of election and reprobation; and clearly shows us, that particular persons are not in holy writ represented as elected absolutely and unconditionally to eternal life, or predestinated absolutely and unconditionally to eternal death; but that believers in general are elected to enjoy the Christian privileges on earth; which if they abuse, those very elect persons will become reprobate.” (accessed July 2, 2013).
The Atonement

Wesley was clear, however, that salvation is effective only because of the work of Jesus on the cross. The question remained: how, precisely, was that work effective? Three forensic options were before Wesley regarding the atonement. These options were divine satisfaction (coming through Anselm), penalty satisfaction (coming through Aquinas), and substitutionary justification (coming through the Reformers, primarily Luther and Calvin). Because of his eclectic nature, hints of all of these are found in Wesley’s writing.

The essence of the divine satisfaction theory is that God’s honor has been breached and only a gift greater to or equal to the breach will stave off punishment. However, since God is infinite, the offense to his honor is also infinite. Therefore, an infinite gift must be offered. That gift was Jesus’s death on the cross. Because of his death we are forgiven for the offense. The honor of God has been satisfied.

The penalty satisfaction theory is similar to the divine satisfaction theory, except that the violation is not of God’s honor, but of divine law. However, as the laws of God are infinite, the penalties are also infinite. The focus here is the satisfaction of divine righteousness. In this case the death of Jesus satisfies the divine law by Jesus, being wholly innocent, taking the penalty upon himself.

The reformers felt as though the previous theories provided only forgiveness, but did not make us righteous. They posited both an active and passive role for the atoning work of Christ. As with the previous two theories, Jesus suffered the punishment for us. This was the passive role. God also imputes his righteousness to us as a substitute and our
guilt to him. This is his active role. In this model we are not simply forgiven, but we become righteous.81

Wesley utilized the imagery of all three of these theories when speaking of the atonement.82 However, as time passed and Wesley received criticism from Reformed opponents, he modified his position. His opponents pointed out that there was no need for someone to try to go on to perfection when the righteousness of Christ had been imputed to them. For Wesley this removed any responsibility on the part of humans in their own righteousness, so he attempted to clarify what he meant by “imputation.”

In his 1765 sermon The Lord Our Righteousness, Wesley continued to speak of the righteousness of Christ as being “imputed,” but insisted that it was imputed upon those who believe.83 In this move Wesley held up human responsibility. His concern with the Reformed position was that it would become an excuse for sin.

“What we are afraid of is this: lest any should use the phrase, ‘The righteousness of Christ,’ or ‘The righteousness of Christ is imputed to me,’ as a cover for his unrighteousness. We have known this done a thousand times. A man has been reproved, suppose for drunkenness: ‘O, said he, ‘I pretend no righteousness of my own; Christ is my righteousness.’”84

While the Reformed tradition argued for the objective aspect of the atoning work of Christ (there is a change in God towards sinners), Wesley primarily argued for the subjective aspect (a change within us). There is certainly an implied objective perspective in Wesley by his use of the imagery of satisfaction, but I could find no place where

81 Maddox, 102-103
84 Ibid. 462.
Wesley spoke of a change that took place in God.\textsuperscript{85} In fact, Wesley argued that God is not somehow fooled regarding our sinful nature because of the cross.\textsuperscript{86} He did, however, speak often of the change that would take place in humans as a result of the work of Christ.\textsuperscript{87}

Wesley’s position speaks to the issue of the connection between justification and sanctification. The Council of Trent stated that infused righteousness was the formal cause of justification, which made sanctification the prerequisite to justification. Luther and his followers argued that that justification preceded sanctification (although they allowed for some connection between the two, recognizing that a justified person might not persevere). Reformed theologians allowed for no connection between the two, keeping them separate so that personal holiness did not endanger justification of the elect.\textsuperscript{88}

Early in his career Wesley was confused about the relationship between the two. In \textit{A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion} Wesley admitted that in 1725 he believed that sanctification was the prerequisite of justification.\textsuperscript{89} However, after his 1738 experience at Aldersgate, it became apparent to him that sanctification could in no way precede justification simply because humans are incapable of doing anything good until God moves in them. Therefore, he came around to the Reformed position that

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{85} Collins speaks of an objective perspective in Wesley, but he primarily addresses this regarding Wesley’s attitude about God’s wrath towards sin, not about a change that takes place within God at the cross. Collins, \textit{Theology}, 103-08.  
\textsuperscript{86} Wesley, “Justification by Faith,” \textit{Works}, 1:188.  
\textsuperscript{88} Maddox, 169.  
justification precedes sanctification. In fact, as late as 1765 he claimed to have not departed from Calvin in this regard.\textsuperscript{90}

Wesley then began to regard justification as that which God does for us, by forgiving our sins\textsuperscript{91} and changing us from enemies of God to children of God. Sanctification follows, wherein God changes us from sinners to saints. Sometimes Wesley referred to sanctification as the new birth. The difference between the two was that justification brought a relative change while sanctification brought a real change.\textsuperscript{92}

However, Wesley became concerned that the priority of justification might lead one to believe that sanctification is not necessary. In seeking a middle way between Trent and the Reformed tradition, Wesley turned to an Anglican scholar and bishop, George Bull. While he rejected Bull’s thinking on the matter in 1738, he later returned to Bull, calling him a “Great light of the Christian Church.”\textsuperscript{93}

Bull postulated a middle way between semi-pelagianism and determinism in his \textit{Harmonia Apostolica}. He spoke of “initial” justification, which did not rely on one’s holiness as a contingent, and final justification, which did. Wesley referred to Bull in a letter to some preachers after a furor over a comment of his that appeared in some meeting minutes. There was great concern that Wesley was turning towards a works-righteousness.\textsuperscript{94} Wesley, however, was concerned with just the opposite. At that meeting he said, “‘We have leaned too much toward Calvinism.’” It was this concern that brought him to a reconsideration of Bull’s thesis.

\textsuperscript{90} Wesley, “The Lord Our Righteousness,” \textit{Works}, 1:455-60.
\textsuperscript{93} Wesley, Letter to Dublin (July 10, 1771), \textit{Letters} (accessed July 4, 2013).
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
He apparently had some of these leanings early on. In *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, written in 1745, Wesley spoke of justification as forgiveness and pardon, which is followed by entire sanctification, which then leads to justification at the last day. In 1756 Wesley wrote a letter to James Hervey, responding to the suggestion that justification is complete at the first moment we believe: “Not so: there may be as many degrees in the favor as in the image of God.” The concerns about Calvinism and the antinomianism that would follow allowed Wesley to return to a position that, if not the same as that of Bull, was very similar. This dual justification let Wesley maintain justification as the initiating work of God without having it lead to antinomianism.

While Lutherans and Calvinists put great stock in justification, Wesley thought that sanctification was the more important issue. For Wesley, the real problem was that we are not what we were intended to be, and justification only relieves us of the guilt of sin, but does not promote a holy life. As a result Wesley essentially altered the Protestant plea of “justification by grace through faith” to “sanctification by grace through faith.”

Perfection

Wesley spent much of his life discussing, preaching on, writing on, defending, and modifying his understanding of Christian perfection. In 1766 he published *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* as an attempt to explain his position on the matter. This was revised several times up to 1777. In that work he discussed the writings that led

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98 Although the bicentennial edition lists the final date of *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* as 1766, Wesley actually revised the document several times up to 1777. However, those revisions held no
him to see the importance of perfection in Christ. There was certainly need for clarification, for Wesley altered his position several times. However, while he did so, he never wavered from the importance of followers of Christ becoming perfect in Christ.

The early Wesley sought perfection through spiritual disciplines, while at the same time denying the possibility of perfection in this life. The driving force behind this was an assurance that he was accepted by God. As noted in the comments about his early life, Wesley was what today might be categorized as something of a legalist. This was certainly evident in his ministry in Georgia.

His experience at Aldersgate changed everything for him. He no longer sought justification through a holy life, but came to realize that justification was a gift of God and that he had received that gift. However, this did not alter his concern for holiness and perfection. Wesley often pointed out that Scripture encourages us to strive for perfection and suggests that it can be attained. Wesley initially believed that this perfection would come instantaneously, but he eventually realized that this would not be the case.

In a preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems, published in 1740, he distinguished the new birth from a point in the future when Christians would be fully born so that they would have no sinful actions, corrupt tempers, evil thoughts, or temptations. This was met with immediate criticism and he responded with a sermon in 1741 in which he tried

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99 Ibid. 136-37.
102 For a timeline of Wesley’s perspective and change regarding perfection, see Maddox, 180-87.
to clear up his meaning of perfection. He stated that perfection does not mean that a Christian is exempt from ignorance, mistakes, illness, or temptation.

However, he continued to assert that newborn Christians are perfect in the sense that they are free from the necessity of committing any outward sins, but mature Christians are free from evil thoughts and tempers. He also asserted that perfection would come in this life, but that it could continually increase.\textsuperscript{105} Despite these claims, he was cautious about recognizing claims of those who reached perfection.\textsuperscript{106} In fact, he stated that though one could attain entire sanctification, it generally did not come until just previous to death.\textsuperscript{107}

Around 1757 Wesley shifted emphasis yet again. He now declared that it was not the general rule for people to attain this just before death, and he encouraged people to seek it earnestly.\textsuperscript{108} He argued that while it might not come until just prior to death, God could cut short the time because time is relative to God.\textsuperscript{109} What caused this shift is unclear, but it was not to be the last change that Wesley would make on the matter.

In the late 1750s and early 1760s Wesley began thinking differently about the relationship between perfection and sin. While earlier he claimed that those perfected would not sin at all, he now modified this to say that they would not engage in voluntary violations of the law. This resulted in a sharp increase of those claiming to have attained perfection in the Methodist societies. It also resulted in some abuses, with certain ones

\textsuperscript{106} Maddox, 182.
\textsuperscript{107} Wesley, “Minutes of Some Late Conversations,” \textit{Wesley’s Works}, vol. 8, 294.
\textsuperscript{108} Wesley, Letter to Dorothy Furly (Sept. 6, 1757),” \textit{Letters} (accessed on July 5, 2013).
\textsuperscript{109} Letter to Miss March Sligo (June 27, 1760), \textit{Letters} (accessed on July 5, 2013).
preaching perfection based only on one’s confession of faith. Wesley responded by re-emphasizing responsible growth in sanctification.¹¹⁰

Because he waffled so much on when a person might become perfect and precisely what it meant for a person to be perfect, he met many challengers, both outside of the Methodist societies and inside. In an attempt to clarify his position yet again, he published *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. While he did modify his position slightly after this publication, it represents the essence of what Wesley was trying to communicate all along.

Wesley continued to maintain that for one to be perfect it meant that he did not commit sin.¹¹¹ Later in the book Wesley specified what he meant by this.

To explain myself a little farther on this head: (1.) Not only sin, properly so called (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law,) but sin, improperly so called, (that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, know or unknown,) needs the atoning blood. (2.) I believe there is no such perfection in this life as excludes these involuntary transgressions which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorance and mistakes inseparable from mortality. (3.) Therefore sinless perfection is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself. (4.) I believe, a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions. (5.) Such transgressions you may call sins, if you please: I do not, for the reasons mentioned above.¹¹²

In this work Wesley referred to people being filled with the love of God. This is really the bottom line. For Wesley, those who are perfected are those who love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.¹¹³ Such love leads people to obey God fully and, by the help of the Spirit, live lives that are free from the control of sin. However, by

¹¹⁰ Maddox, 184-85
¹¹² Ibid. 169-170.
¹¹³ Ibid. 167.
stating that someone is free from the control of sin, Wesley did not imagine that sin would be out of view.

In his 1762 sermon “On Sin in Believers,” Wesley affirmed that people can never say that they are free from sin in their hearts (at least in this life).\textsuperscript{114} Sin certainly exists in babes in Christ, and Wesley appears to have allowed for it in the mature Christian as well, but emphasized that sin does not reign in such a one.\textsuperscript{115} Once again Wesley was giving emphasis to the process of growth in holiness. In his 1765 sermon, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” Wesley spoke of waiting for entire sanctification, which is a full salvation from sin.\textsuperscript{116}

Wesley returned to the position that most are not perfected in love until just before death,\textsuperscript{117} but he continued to insist that perfection comes instantaneously. In the same way that people die in a moment, though they do not recognize the moment of their death, so also perfection will come upon them in a moment, though they may never know when the moment was. Having said this, he allowed for continual growth up to perfection\textsuperscript{118} and even allowed for growth afterwards.\textsuperscript{119}

His position continued to soften such that by 1787 Wesley no longer imagined those who had not reached perfection to be non-Christians. In his sermon “The More Excellent Way,” Wesley spoke of two orders of Christians. The first are those who have

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid. 327.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid. “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” 13:160.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid. “Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection,” 106.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid. “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” 187.
attained perfection (though Wesley does not use that phrase here), and the second are those who strove for it but never quite attained it. Wesley affirmed the salvation of both.

At this point he seemed concerned that holding the high bar of perfection had been discouraging to many. Previously he was firm regarding perfection. In his earlier sermon “Christian Perfection,” Wesley said that those who had not gone on to perfection were not Christians and he disavowed varying levels of perfection. However, by 1787 he softened this so as to avoid discouragement. He encouraged people to strive on for perfection without fear of hell. “I would encourage them to come up higher, without thundering hell and damnation in their ears.”

The difficulty, however, was that the motivation for perfection was now lost. If one can be less than perfect and be saved, why would one choose to go on to perfection? The very problem he started out to rebuff (nominal Christianity) was now a possibility again. Wesley anticipated this in the sermon and provided an alternate motivation. He asserted that those who have gone on to perfection receive a higher place in heaven.

In addition to softening his position, Wesley was beginning to waver regarding whether perfection would continue after death. He rejected any notion of purgatory as a place to cleanse sin. He also rejected the Lutheran notion of death itself as that which cleanses sin. In 1758 he wrote two letters that indicated that perfection must occur before death. However, just two years before, he had responded to a letter by

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122 Ibid.
124 Collins, Theology, 305.
125 Wesley, Letter to Elizabeth Hardy (April 5, 1758) and Letter to Mr. Potter (Nov. 4, 1758), Letters (accessed on July 5, 2013).
indicating that one may be perfected in paradise.\textsuperscript{126} In 1763 he responded to a question by stating that people may grow in grace throughout eternity.\textsuperscript{127} In his 1791 sermon “On Faith,” Wesley said that those in paradise are “ripening” for heaven.\textsuperscript{128}

In 1787 Wesley translated a tract written by Charles Bonnet. In his introductory comments Wesley referred to it as one of the most sensible tracts he had ever read. In the tract Bonnet wrote, “Every thing in the works of nature is done by degrees; a development, more or less slow, conducts all beings to the perfection that properly belongs to them. Our soul is only beginning to unfold itself; but this plant, so weak in its principles, so slow in its progress, will extend its roots and its branches into eternity.”\textsuperscript{129}

These later thoughts have some relationship to Eastern thinking on the matter. Given the influence that at least two of these writers had on Wesley’s theology, it is not unreasonable that he might have drawn from them on this matter. Maddox compares it to Irenaeus’s explanation for the purpose of the millennium.\textsuperscript{130} If this is the case, then we can see that Wesley certainly came to the conclusion, through years of experience, that perfection may not be accomplished for all, or even for most, in this life.

The term “Perfection” became problematic for Wesley because he realized what most of us come to see, that no one seems to attain such in the present life. Yet Scripture speaks of this as our goal (Matt. 5:48; Col. 1:28; James 1:4). The meaning of the Greek term τέλος can be debated (does it mean perfection, maturity, or completeness?), but this

\textsuperscript{127} Wesley, “Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection,” 13:110.
\textsuperscript{130} Maddox, 250.
does not negate the fact that we are called to such and no one seems to attain it. If a person does not reach perfection in this life, the obvious conclusion is that it will be attained at death, or in the next life.

Wesley and the Theology of Transformation

There are two important premises for Wesley’s theology of holiness (transformation) that are significant for this project, both of which find their foundation in Scripture. The first is the understanding that humans play a role in their own transformation and that transformation is not solely the work of God. The second premise is that holiness (transformation) is an inherent part of salvation.

As Wesley noticed, the overemphasis on the sovereignty of God in certain traditions has often led to the conclusion that humans play no role in their own transformation. This overemphasis has led some to manipulate Scripture to fit their preconceived notion of God’s control over all matters.131 While Scripture speaks to the sovereignty of God, it also speaks to the free will of humans. Working out the tension between these two has been an ongoing challenge.

Free will is assumed throughout Scripture. One need only read the letters of Paul and hear him speak in the imperative mode to his audience. He instructs them to accept others (Rom. 14:1), flee from sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18), put on the mind of Christ.

131 A blatant example of this is Augustine’s interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:4 which states that God wants all to be saved. Augustine, knowing that Scripture also points out that not everyone is saved, felt a need to rescue God’s sovereignty because otherwise it appeared that God wants something that he does not get. To make the Scripture fit into his assumption about God’s sovereignty, Augustine interpreted 1 Tim. 2:4 to mean “All those that are saved are saved because God wants them to be saved.” This, of course, is not what the passage says, read simply. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, trans. and ed. Albert Outler (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1955), http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/augustine_enchiridion_02_trans.htm#C27, (accessed Nov. 22, 2013).
(Phil. 2:5), and set their hearts on things above (Col. 3:1). Each assumes that Paul’s audience has the ability to do that which Paul instructed them to do. This assumption is found throughout Scripture. The Lord called Israel to live a certain way, assuming that it could choose to do so. The prophets scolded Israel for not living that way, assuming that it could have done so. Jesus instructed his disciples on how to live, assuming that they could live that way.

Conditional clauses in Scripture suggest that humans have a certain amount of control in the outcome of events. For example, the Lord said, “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). The use of such conditional clauses is unnecessary if humans do not have a choice. But such clauses are numerous in Scripture. If humans have no free will, there is little use for the word “if” in the Bible when it comes to human relationship with God.

While there are places in Scripture that suggest God’s total control over his creation, including the will of humans, there are also those that point towards the lack of God’s control over everything. For instance, Scripture speaks of certain matters that go against the desires of God, including sacrifice over mercy (Hos. 6:6), some who are lost despite God’s will for the contrary (1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:9; cf. Matt. 7:13-14), and the people of Judah who offered child sacrifices despite the fact that God never commanded it nor did it enter his mind (Jer. 32:35).132

132 For more on challenges to a deterministic understanding of God, see John Sanders, The God Who Risks (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 1998; Clark Pinnock and others, The Openness of God
There are dangers, of course, in emphasizing the free will of humans to the neglect of the sovereignty of God. In this case humans may easily assume that they have merited something from God or that God owes them something for their righteous behavior. However, there are equal dangers in emphasizing the sovereignty of God over the free will of humans. One significant danger is that human responsibility for sin is minimized or dismissed. Another danger is that Christians may become passive in their own transformation into the image of Christ, assuming that “all is of God.”

Scripture addresses both of these matters, but I will address only the latter in this project. Regarding free will, Wesley’s arguments for our role in our own transformation can be easily substantiated in Scripture. There are a number of examples in Scripture of people who engage in practices that develop them spiritually. Jesus himself provided the model as he engaged in practices such as prayer (Luke 11:1), fasting (Matt. 4:2), solitude (Mark 1:35), and simplicity (Matt. 8:20). Early Christians followed by fasting (Acts 13:2), praying (Acts 4:23-30), and practicing benevolence (Acts 9:36-37), believing that such practices formed them. Writers of the New Testament encouraged Christians to pray (1 Thess. 5:17), practice hospitality (Rom. 12:13), and study Scripture (Eph. 6:17). None of these would have been necessary if “all is of God.”

Wesley’s position regarding cooperation with God resonates well with Scripture. Peter wrote that God’s divine power has given everything we need, and then proceeded to instruct Christians to add to this (2 Pet. 1:3-5). Peter also encouraged Christians to make

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133 It is not within the scope of this project to explore ways in which the sovereignty of God is neglected so that humans imagine that they can gain salvation by merit, although there is certainly value in such explorations.
their calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10) and to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Likewise, Jesus encouraged his disciples to make every effort to enter through the narrow door (Luke 13:24), to seek the kingdom first (Matt. 6:33), and to deny themselves and take up their cross (Matt. 16:24). Paul encouraged Christians to “Keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25) and to think on things that are excellent and praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8). It is evident from these texts and many others that God has made us collaborators in his good intentions for us.

As Wesley noticed, how we think about the atonement plays a significant role in our transformation. If the atonement is understood to be objective only, then we easily become passive instruments of God’s grace in our lives. God has intervened and justified us and now we simply wait for the consummation of that justification. There is no need for us to be formed into the image of Christ or engage in God’s mission in the world. However, as Wesley pointed out, this way of thinking presumes that God is simply playing a trick on his own mind. God intends for us to become how he designed us to be, but an objective understanding does not actually change us. It only suggests that God looks at us differently, not that we actually are different.

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134 This attitude is confirmed by the research of Chen-Bo Zhong and Katie Liljenquist. These two researchers conducted a study in which participants were asked to recall a moral failure. Afterwards some of the participants were given antiseptic wipes. The entire group was then asked to provide a service free of charge. Those who received the antiseptic wipes were less likely to want to help. Zhong and Liljenquist used the study to demonstrate a psychological link between physical and spiritual cleansing, but the study also demonstrates that when people feel clean they are less likely to want to help others. Although the study did not address transformation, the results would suggest that participants who feel that they have been made clean would also be less likely to feel a need to do anything further to become clean. In other words, they would not need to work towards transformation. Objective theories of the atonement do just what the study demonstrates; they have a way of making people feel clean, and feeling clean they have no motivation to engage in transformative acts or to do service for others. Chen-Bo Zhong and Katie Liljenquist, “Washing Away Your Sins: Threatened Morality and Physical Cleansing,” *Science* (Sept. 2006); 1451-52.
If we are not transformed into the image of Christ, then are we to understand that the next life is filled with people who are the same self-centered people as before, but that they are viewed by God as otherwise? Is heaven actually a place filled with sinners who are cloaked as righteous without being righteous? Or are we to understand that God brings about transformation through some other means, such as purgatory or death? A subjective understanding of the atonement offers an alternative.

A subjective understanding suggests that something happens within us because of the cross and that we are being transformed now into what God wants us to be as a result. Granted, as Wesley discovered, this transformation is never fully achieved in this life. If one considers the Eastern understanding, for which Wesley had some affinities, one could conclude that transformation is never actually achieved, but is eternal. This is because, as Gregory of Nyssa argues, perfection means assimilation with God, who is infinite. Therefore, one is infinitely undergoing transformation because God is infinite.\(^{135}\)

Understood this way, transformation is not an option for Christians, but is inherent in their salvation because transformation is salvation. Scripture continually reminds us that we are not just being saved from some future loss or destruction, but that we are being saved from something in the present (Acts 2:40; 1 Pet. 1:18). Sin seeks to destroy our lives and the lives of those around us now. God seeks to save us from the power of sin now. Salvation is more dynamic than static. That is, while salvation may be

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thought of as a past event (Eph. 2:5) that is consummated in the future (Rom. 5:9-10), it must also be understood as ongoing (1 Cor. 1:18).

One seeks transformation because it is the very life that God intends for us to have. This is made clear in the Gospel of John where Jesus states that he came that we would have life to the full (John 10:10). The term “life” in John’s Gospel is not limited to the future. On the contrary, John states that those who have become followers of Jesus have life as a present possession (John 5:24; 6:47). Salvation is life. It is the best life possible. It is experienced now and will continue on into eternity.

When we understand salvation in terms of transformation, we can see why Christians are urged to go on to maturity (Heb. 6:1), grow in their salvation (1 Pet. 2:2), press on to the prize (Phil. 4:12-15), make every effort to add to their faith (2 Pet. 1:5), and to be transformed (Rom. 12:2). Transformation is not an option for followers of Jesus, nor is it something to do to achieve salvation. Transformation is salvation. Becoming like Christ is becoming what God intends for us to be.

I have used the language of transformation while Wesley focused on sanctification, but they are actually the same. In the same way that salvation has past, present, and future elements, sanctification is also a past event (1 Cor. 6:11), ongoing (1 Thess. 4:1-3), and will happen in the future (Eph. 4:13). The writer of Hebrews states, “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Heb.10:14), fully integrating a past event with an ongoing process.

**Biblical Practices For Transformation**

As noted above, Scripture provides a number of practices that lead to transformation. In this project I have focused on three of those practices. First is the study
of Scripture. The study of Scripture was important to early Christians (Acts 17:11). It was understood that Scripture could penetrate the soul (Heb. 4:12), make one wise for salvation (2 Tim. 3:15), and was useful for training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Therefore the public reading of Scripture was encouraged (1 Tim. 4:13). Because many of these Christians were Jewish, they already understood the value of Scripture. They were raised to meditate on the law (Psalm 1:2), keep it in their hearts (Psalm 40:8), and long for it (Psalm 119:20).

Scripture was never considered the property of any individual. The development of the canon of Scripture bears this out. It was the Jewish community that determined what books they considered authoritative and God-breathed in what we call the Old Testament, and the Christian community did the same with the New Testament. Scripture was the property of the community and was discerned in the community. An example of the communal discernment of Scripture is found in Acts 15, where the council in Jerusalem wrestled with the fact that Paul and Barnabas were teaching Gentiles and how that resonated with Scripture. In addition, when Paul wrote his letters, they were to be read aloud to the community (1 Thess. 5:27). Letters that appear to be addressed to individuals also have a communal element to them (Philem. 2).

The second was communal discernment. Jesus encouraged communal discernment for the church in dealing with those who have sinned (Matt. 18:15-20). Paul encouraged the same discernment when it came to the handling of disagreements in the church (1 Cor. 6:1-9). Such communal discernment had a long history in Jewish tradition. The book of Proverbs speaks often of the value that is gained when people learn from
others (Prov. 12:15; 13:20; 27:17). Therefore, the practice of groups that read and listen to the word of God and then discern that word together has a strong biblical basis.

However, simply hearing the word was never considered sufficient. If one was to truly be shaped by the word, one must put it into practice. After Jesus taught his disciples about becoming something much more than the Pharisees and teachers of the law (Matt. 5:20), he told them that those who put his words into practice were like the wise man that built his house upon a rock (Matt. 7:24). This sentiment is echoed by Paul. He encouraged the Christians in Rome to be transformed and then proceeded to tell them the things to do that would help transform them (Rom. 12:2-19). The book of James tells us to not merely listen to Scripture, but to “Do what it says” (James 1:22). Doing something leads to being something. Thus the third practice is “doing the word.”

There is a continual encouragement in Scripture to behave in certain ways. Writers of the New Testament encouraged Christians to live in harmony with each other (Rom. 12:16), speak truthfully (Eph. 4:25), think about excellent and praiseworthy things (Phil. 4:8), be subject to those in authority (Titus 3:1), keep themselves free from the love of money (Heb. 13:5), and control their tongues (James 3:3-8). It was not enough to learn about these things. They needed to practice them.

Wesley’s Methodology

If God is love, as Wesley believed, then God made us collaborators with him in our transformation/salvation. He empowered us by his grace to become what he always intended for us to be. The freedom God gave us enables us to participate in our transformation into the image of Christ and therefore attain perfection. It was these basic presuppositions that drove Wesley’s methodology.
After Wesley resolved to develop holiness in his own life, he also felt compelled to stimulate others to the same. He began preaching, but by his own admission, he was not well received in the Anglican fellowships throughout England. As a result he took to the street to do his preaching, having been encouraged by George Whitefield to do so.¹³⁶ There he received a hearing and many responded well to his preaching.

His preaching was specifically aimed at the topic of faith and holiness, assuming that most who heard his sermons had been baptized as infants and were therefore, in some sense, Christians. However, Wesley would later say that they were not really Christians unless drunkards, liars, swearers, and cheaters were considered “Christians.” At most, Wesley claimed, they could be considered devil Christians.¹³⁷ His goal was to awaken them whether they had been baptized or not.

However, once they were awakened, what should be done? Were the people to be left on their own to grow in holiness? Some may have imagined this to be the case. The individualism currently prevalent in Western society in the twenty-first century was something of an issue in England in the eighteenth century as well. Wesley addressed this matter on more than one occasion by insisting that one could not grow in holiness alone. God provided the church as a community of faith so that Christians could help one another in such growth. He insisted that Christianity could not subsist without society.¹³⁸

Wesley never sought to depart from the Anglican Church and encouraged those in his societies to participate in the worship at their local congregation, be they Presbyterian,

¹³⁶ Collins, A Real Christian, 69.
¹³⁸ Ibid. “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount (IV),” 1:533-34.
Anabaptist, or Quaker. Because Wesley understood that the church consists of the body of believers, he did not consider the worship experience to be the only or even primary place that holiness would be cultivated. This would happen in the groups within the societies.

The idea of groups became apparent to him after he began his field preaching. Many of those who heard Wesley’s preaching asked him to come teach them in their homes. He began doing this but soon discovered that there were too many and that he could never manage to provide direction in holiness to so many in such small ways. Wesley found the resolution to this problem was the development of small groups.

He was far from the first to utilize such a method. In fact, Wesley himself noted that this seemed to be what the earliest Christians were doing. In an attempt to nurture an environment where spiritual growth could occur, and to do so in an effective manner, he developed four levels of groups. These groups were the class meetings, bands, penitent bands, and select societies. As group members matured, they moved up to the next group. Group activities included singing, praying, having Bible discussions, and holding one another accountable.

At the same time Wesley encouraged individual practices that would help the members grow in holiness. An example of this is a letter Wesley wrote to one of his lay preachers, chiding the man for his lack of growth as a person and as a preacher. The

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140 Ibid. “A Plain Account of a People Called Methodists,” 9:256.
143 Maddox, 212.
cause of this was a neglect of personal devotion to God. He wrote, “Fix some part of every day for private exercises. You may acquire the taste which you have not; what is tedious at first will afterwards be pleasant. Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life.”

For Wesley, the combination of preaching, personal devotion, and group interaction helped people grow in holiness. He always assumed that God provided the grace for growth, but that individuals were responsible to cultivate what the Spirit provided in their lives. Because Christianity is inherently relational, they were also to help one another in the growth. Much of this would be stimulated by the preaching that they heard from Wesley or one of his lay preachers.

**Implications of John Wesley for the North Street Church of Christ**

Wesley is an appropriate lens through which to view transformation at North Street because his situation has similarities to ours in that “nominal Christianity” is a pressing issue in American churches and at North Street. Wesley’s interest in transformation and his use of small groups to accomplish it inform the aims and methods of this project as well. Finally, Wesley was first and foremost a preacher who sought to use his preaching as a catalyst for transformation. This project seeks to enhance the sermon experience for the purpose of transformation, to which Wesley has much to offer as we consider the implications of preaching for transformation at North Street.

Wesley is well known for his field preaching to those unconverted or those who were Christian in name only (that is, they were baptized as infants, but never attempted to

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live as Christians). His focus was on awakening people to their sin and their need for Christ. However, there is evidence that most of his preaching was actually done in his society meetings. This will be addressed further in chapter 4. The preaching in the societies would more nearly match that which takes place at North Street. It is assumed that the primary goal of preaching at North Street is not to awaken non-Christians, but to help those who are already Christians live the Christian life more faithfully. Therefore the sermons are not primarily “awakening sermons.”

Wesley soon came to realize that he could not count on the sermon alone to bring about transformation. As a result he developed small groups where Christians could encourage one another in the faith and challenge one another to become what God intended for them to be. While the structure of the home groups for North Street is not meant to imitate that of Wesley’s groups, the goal of the groups is the same: transformation through communal discernment. Numerous studies have taught us that learning happens in various ways for people. One of those ways is through interaction with others.

Wesley’s free-will theology resonates well in Churches of Christ. While Churches of Christ typically accept that transformation comes only by the power of God, we also accept that God calls us to open ourselves to the work of the Spirit and to engage in activities that will nurture transformation in our lives. However, while Wesley engaged in speculation regarding the origin of sin and whether free will was totally lost, Churches of Christ have usually bypassed such speculation and simply accepted that we are sinful beings who have free will.

145 This will be addressed further in chapter 4.
Wesley’s understanding of salvation is not generally shared by North Street members. Most would imagine that salvation in static rather than dynamic terms; salvation is a destination. As mentioned at the outset, this tends to minimize the importance of transformation and maximize the importance of doing whatever is necessary to reach the destination. I hope that this project will demonstrate a need to have a more dynamic understanding of salvation that will encourage the need for transformation.

Wesley’s life and theological shifts may also speak to us regarding a needed balance when we think of transformation. Wesley witnessed the result of those who lowered the bar of expectations for Christians to such an extent that the difference between believers and nonbelievers was not noticeable. This is also the risk that is run when the church speaks a message of grace. Whereas the expectations for godly living, involvement in ministry, and church attendance were once high in Churches of Christ, the message of grace seems to have convinced some that there are no expectations beyond showing up for worship service on a semi-regular basis.

However, if one raises the bar too high, as Wesley did in his earlier years, there is a risk of discouragement by those who feel that they will never be able to achieve this standard. In this case some Christians may choose to give up. There is also the possibility that some will begin taking on self-righteous attitudes as they see themselves achieving higher levels of transformation than others and then become harsh and rigid with those others. Wesley seemed to have fallen into this trap in his early years.
The later Wesley seemed to find more balance in this regard. He appeared to develop a more dynamic understanding of transformation and salvation than he held to in his earlier years. It began at his second conversion in 1738 and blossomed in his golden years. As Outler noted, Wesley changed from a man of passion to a man of compassion.\footnote{Outler, \textit{Evangelism}, 19.} It is often the young ones who are the last to drop their stones.\footnote{John 8:9.} There are plenty of stones that have been thrown in Churches of Christ. While we do not wish to return to the stone-throwing days, we must also call one another to formation into the image of Christ and engage in practices that support that call. Wesley’s theology and experiences can be helpful as we in Churches of Christ generally, and at North Street specifically, seek balance.

The significance of this challenge is seen not only in our churches, but in the witness that our churches provide. What sort of testimony is the church giving when the lives of her members are not noticeably different from those in the surrounding culture? This too, as Outler points out, was Wesley’s concern. “Wesley understood, as we seem to have forgotten, that it is the Word made visible in the lives of practicing, witnessing lay Christians that constitutes the church’s most powerful evangelistic influence.”\footnote{Outler, \textit{Evangelism}, 26.} If North Street Church seeks to be a witness to the community, we must, by our corporate life, offer something distinct from what the culture has to offer. If we do not, there is no reason for our neighbors to pay attention.
Conclusion

Wesley helps us see the need for transformation. He recognized the value of Scripture in bringing about transformation and the important role that preaching played. If we place the same importance on the transformational power of Scripture and preaching, there needs to be a process by which listeners can engage with Scripture so that they may better hear the sermon and be formed by it. In addition, there is a need for individuals to encourage and teach one another in a setting that also promotes accountability. While members at North Street are encouraged to practice virtues learned, there is no mechanism in place for maintaining accountability in those practices. Wesley’s efficient use of preaching and small groups prompts us to provide a structure in which these can take place. This project seeks to provide this structure.

The methodology that follows builds upon the theological assumption that transformation is of primary importance for Christians and that each one has a role to play in that transformation. The disciplines of lectio divina, communal discernment, and practical application of lessons learned are all ways in which Christians can hone the gift of grace given to them. In engaging in these practices they are preparing themselves to hear the sermon in a way that will more fully lead to transformation.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The intent of this project was to provide a structure by which the sermon is enhanced so that listeners may experience transformation into the image of Christ. The structure involved a process by which members of North Street were proactively engaged in the text of the sermon before and after they heard it. This structure is both individualistic and collaborative. It involves listening and doing. It involves reading and reflecting. The value of this structure is supported by research from the fields of both education and theology.

Action research was utilized in this project. Action research, also known as participatory action research, allows participants to be actively engaged, along with the researcher, in a study of which they are the subjects.

1 This project focused on the lived experiences of people from North Street. The result of this project should lead to a deeper understanding of what it means to be transformed into the image of Christ. This chapter provides details about the methodology, including a description of the participants, the format of the sessions, and a description of the evaluation methods. It will also provide substantiation for the methodology.

Group Participants

I used the maximum variation sampling method in selecting participants. This method seeks a broad range of people as participants so that I could see the variation of

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experiences. Eight individuals who are members of North Street and who regularly attend Sunday morning worship were involved in the project. The participants represented a cross-section of the congregation. They were of different ethnicities, ages, theological perspectives, and educational backgrounds. Some of them had a background in Churches of Christ while others did not. It is my hope that this project will provide the leadership of North Street a glimpse of how these practices will enhance the listening experience for individuals of all backgrounds in the congregation.

Format of the Sessions

The participants were involved in several exercises each week. First, they practiced *lectio divina* with the text provided. Afterwards, they attended worship, hearing the Scripture read and listening to the sermon. They also attended group meetings on the following Monday night and participated in a discussion of their *lectio divina* experiences and how that related to what they had heard in the sermon. Group members were encouraged to challenge the sermon and one another in a godly and loving manner. Finally, the group formulated ways in which they could put what they learned into practice.

While the group met only six times to discuss the text under consideration, they met for eight consecutive Monday nights. These meetings were held in room 10 of the North Street building. The first session was an orientation; the last session was an

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3 For a copy of the letter that was sent to invitees, see appendix B.
4 Given that there are four modes in *lectio divina* but only seven days in the week, it is difficult to fit the modes into the days in a systematic way. Therefore participants were asked to begin their *lectio divina* exercise on Monday nights by doing the *lectio* portion when they arrived home that evening. They could then engage in one practice daily, which would allow them to go through the whole process twice because on one day (Monday) they would have engaged in two of the modes.
interview with the independent expert (hereinafter called an IE). The group met from 6:30 to 7:30 on Monday evenings, with two exceptions that will be discussed below. Child care was offered but not accepted.

I preached a series of sermons on “grace” over a six-week period from October 6th to November 17th. I provided the group with the main biblical texts for all the sermons at the orientation meeting. I asked the group members to take a minimum of fifteen minutes a day to read, meditate on, pray over, and journal about the text for the week. At the orientation meeting I equipped the group to practice lectio divina utilizing the definition for lectio divina from Ware’s discussion in Discover Your Spiritual Type. In addition, I provided group members with a description of journaling from Calhoun’s Spiritual Disciplines Handbook. I instructed them to journal about their experience with the lectio divina exercise each day. I asked group members to bring their journals to the weekly meetings as a reference for their own discussions.

The orientation meeting provided an opportunity for individuals to learn what the process would look like and to ask questions. At that meeting I provided a notebook to each participant for the purpose of journaling and I collected the informed consent forms that the group members had signed. In addition, I led the group through a practice session of lectio divina so that they would have some actual experience with the exercise.

There are four modes to lectio divina. The first, lectio (reading), uses the senses to perceive what is actually in the text. In reading the Scripture, readers attempt to put themselves into the text. What are the smells and sounds around them? What is the

5 Appendix C.
6 Appendix D.
7 Appendix E.
audience like who hears these words? How is the writer delivering them? In this way readers seek to immerse themselves into the text so that they feel as though they are present.

In the second mode, meditatio (meditation), readers reflect on what they have read and begin to ask about the meaning of the text. Why was this written? How does this text fit into the larger story of Scripture? What is the writer intending in the text? In addition, readers were asked to inquire about the meaning of the text in their own lives. How does this text impact their lives? What are the implications if one takes this text seriously?

The third mode, oratio (prayer), asks readers to speak to God about the text. How do readers feel when they read this text? Are they made anxious by the implications of the text? Does the text give them a sense of joy, guilt, or fear? Readers may think that this text contradicts another passage of Scripture. In oratio readers seek God’s guidance in understanding the text and help in guiding them into living the text.

In the fourth mode, contemplatio (contemplation), readers are not speaking to God, but listening for a word from God. Now that they have immersed themselves in the text, wrestled with the implications of the text, and spoken to God about the text, they wait to hear from God about the text. What is it that God wants the readers to hear? How is it that God will have them live this text? This last question gets to the heart of lectio divina. As Eugene Peterson notes, “lectio divina is not a methodical technique for reading the Bible. It is a cultivated, developed habit of living the text in Jesus’ name.”

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8 Ware, 103-6.
9 Peterson, 116.
The format for weeks 2-6 (October 7—November 4) followed the same pattern. This pattern began by opening the meeting with prayer. After this I led the group in approximately forty-five minutes of discussion. During the remaining time I asked the group to consider ways that the things they learned may be implemented in their lives and commit themselves to engage in at least one of these practices. The meeting closed with prayer.

The group meeting on week 7 (November 11) took thirty minutes longer. During the last thirty minutes of this meeting individuals were given a questionnaire with four questions on it. This questionnaire provided me with an insider’s perspective on the value of the project for those in the group as well as for others. The plan was for the group to meet on Monday night as usual for the IE to interview them. However, due to an unforeseen scheduling conflict with the IE, that meeting had to be moved to Thursday night, November 21 at the same time and place.

This format follows the practices that early Christians engaged in for the purpose of transformation. First, there is an emphasis on Scripture. Individuals read and meditated upon Scripture, then listened to the preaching of that same Scripture. But they also practiced communal discernment by gathering together to listen to one another, as well as to teach, encourage, and admonish one another. Finally, they put what they learned into practice so that their practices became a part of who they were.

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10 Appendix F.
Evaluation of the Methodology

Qualitative methods were used in assessing whether the sermon was enhanced for listeners by the process discussed. Quantitative research uses instruments that provide a standardized framework for measuring data that allows the researcher to fit individuals into the standardized categories. Qualitative research, however, actually measures the experiences of individuals themselves. The value of qualitative research is that it allows the thoughts and feelings of those researched to be heard so that a thicker description of the situation is understood.12

The words and the stories coming from the participants in the research often provide a fuller picture than pages of numbers.13 The qualitative researcher not only listens, but also observes. Much is communicated not only in what is said, but in how it is said, in facial expressions, how participants interact with one another, and what seats they choose at group meetings. That methodology fit well with this exercise, allowing participants to share their experiences and tell their stories while I attempted to see and hear those things that went unspoken.14

In qualitative research the researcher engages in activities with the participants and from that participation attains data. In addition to the observations by the researcher, the data collected include interviews, observations, and questionnaires. These raw data are then translated into a coherent story that reflects the experiences of the participants. In

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12 Patton, 22.
14 Patton, 30-31.
the end the researcher is attempting to discern what all of the data mean.\textsuperscript{15} This allows the researcher to analyze the effectiveness of the project. This is the format that I followed.

In an attempt to verify the data, I utilized the concept of triangulation, specifically a multiple perspective triangulation. This approach provides checks and balances to the biases that may be present in only one perspective.\textsuperscript{16} The three different angles in this project were the participants, an IE, and me. While there will always be bias in qualitative research, these three angles should provide North Street leadership with a good understanding of the value of this type of practice in the congregation.

Field Notes

The first instrument I utilized in achieving a “thicker” description was field notes. These were notes that were taken during the group meetings. My wife, Lisa Barbarick, served as a non-participant observer (hereinafter referred to as NPO) to take notes. She is a certified public accountant who has a good eye for details. She is trusted in the congregation and her presence was not a distraction.

I provided training for Mrs. Barbarick on the protocol for taking notes.\textsuperscript{17} I instructed her to avoid being vague and to be detailed and descriptive with her notes without making judgments or generalizations about individuals or statements that they made. She was to make note of the following: (1) the date, time and place of the exercise, (2) attendance and seating arrangement of the group,\textsuperscript{18} (3) the way that members of the group interacted with one another and with me, (4) the content of the discussion, giving

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 22.
\textsuperscript{16} Patton, 331.
\textsuperscript{17} Appendix G.
\textsuperscript{18} Appendix H.
attention to key words or phrases that were repeated, (5) non-verbal cues as to how the group members were feeling about the discussion or how they were interacting with one another, and (6) an observation of how the group members interacted in the first few moments before and after the group sessions.

An NPO was used so that I would be free to observe body language, facial expression, and other non-verbal communications. The notes were evaluated and expanded fifteen minutes after the group meetings. I typed these notes in a Microsoft Word document and used them as a data set by which I was able to evaluate the effectiveness of the process on individuals as well as the group.

In my analysis of these notes, I identified the themes and categories that arose from the notes. I allowed those themes and categories to evolve throughout the sessions, avoiding the impact of initial insights in the first few sessions. I used the following protocol: (1) Before reading through the NPO’s notes, I wrote down my own observations; (2) I then read through the data recorded by the NPO that evening (3), archived reoccurring themes, words, or phrases used by group members, (4) clustered these in their categories, (5) assigned codes\textsuperscript{19} to each and inserted them into the data records, and (6) categorized these for an interpretation of the project’s effectiveness.

Insider Evaluation

The second instrument utilized to achieve a thicker description was the insider evaluation. At the week 7 meeting, the group was given a questionnaire regarding their experience during this exercise. The questionnaire consisted of the following four

\textsuperscript{19} I followed the advice of Miles and Huberman and utilized a coding structure that had general domains that can be inductively developed. Miles and Huberman, 57. See appendix I.
questions: (1) How did this experience change how you hear the sermon on Sunday morning? (2) How did the practice of *lectio divina* contribute to your understanding of the text? (3) In what way did you find the group interaction to be helpful in your own transformation? (4) Describe the ways in which this exercise has helped you to be more fully transformed into the image of Christ.\(^{20}\)

I passed out the questionnaire at the beginning of the last thirty minutes of session 7. I instructed the group not to place their names on the questionnaire. The questionnaires were numbered for the purposes of coding. I read each question out loud before they began and asked if there were any questions about the questionnaire. I then left the room but remained available for questions while they were each filling out the questionnaire. I instructed them to leave the room if they finished the questionnaire early so as not to be a distraction to the others. They were instructed to place their finished questionnaires in a large folder outside of the room.

Independent Expert

The third instrument that I used was that of an IE. The IE was brought in to interview the group in week 8. The IE was given the freedom to evaluate the group and individuals based on his expertise and by the method the IE deemed most desirable. At the request of the IE, I offered several ideas about what questions could be asked, ensuring he understood what I was trying to accomplish in the project. On Monday, November 25, the IE submitted a written report to me regarding his findings.\(^{21}\) The IE was Dr. Bill Gandin, pastor of the United Methodist Church in Nacogdoches. Dr. Gandin

\(^{20}\) Appendix J.

\(^{21}\) Appendix K.
was highly qualified to conduct this interview because of his Wesleyan background and his experience with *Walk to Emmaus*.\(^{22}\)

In analyzing all of the data acquired by the three angles of interpretation, I looked for patterns, slippages, and silences.\(^{23}\) The patterns reflected the overlapping themes that occurred throughout. The slippages reflected the disagreements in the data, and the silences reflected those things taken for granted by individuals or the group. This evaluation method provided a thicker description of the experience of the group throughout the process.

**Validation of the Process**

In educational circles it is well understood that students have different learning styles and teachers are more able to facilitate learning when they grasp how students learn. This project sought to take advantage of the varied learning styles that are present within the congregation. There was an audial, reflective, communal, and action aspect to the project. While this in no way encompasses all of the learning styles listeners may have, it does provide more possibilities than the sermon alone.

In addition to connecting with the varied learning styles, this project also connects with varied spiritual types. These types have been categorized by Holmes, Sager, and Westerhoff.\(^{24}\) The essence of these types is broken down into four quadrants. The top and

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\(^{22}\) *Walk To Emmaus* is a Methodist organization that attempts to train individuals for the holiness that John Wesley envisioned. Information about Walk to Emmaus can be found at http://emmaus.upperroom.org/about.


bottom of the quadrants represent an illumination (mind) and affective (heart) relationship with God, respectively. The left and right sides represent techniques, the left being the mysterious nature of God (apophatic) that cannot be known, while the right side represents the revealed side (kataphatic), which can be known. 25 Research has shown a strong correlation between these spiritual types and learning styles. 26 Thus in connecting with the varied learning styles, this project is also appealing to the varied spiritual types present within the congregation.

Learning styles are defined differently by different researchers, but the common theme in each is that individuals process information differently and therefore learn in different ways. 27 Some learn best individually while others learn better in groups. Some are more audial, others more visual, and still others more tactile in their learning. There is agreement among researchers that students perform better when teaching matches the learning style of the individual student. 28

The sermon is primarily an audial event that appeals to the kataphatic mind spiritual type and the analytic learner learning style. Words, as we have long known, have power. One need only consider the words spoken by Dr. King that motivated a movement. Yet it is not simply the words that have power. The power also comes from the way that the words are spoken. The same words given by one that inspire can be

25 Appendix L.
27 Lee, 101, 103.
given by another and fall flat. We need only think of one person’s ability to tell a joke and another person’s inability to tell the same joke.

Although sermons are audial events, they certainly have a visual component as well, since the preacher, generally speaking, is physically present and can be seen by the audience. The facial gestures, hand movements, and overall body language communicate something to the audience that words alone do not. If it is true that most communication is nonverbal, then a physical presence for preachers is significant in the act of preaching and in the act of listening. Because of the varied learning styles, some will be more moved by the experience of the preaching event alone than will others.

The *lectio divina* exercise allows individuals to read and reflect on Scripture in a solitary manner. This fits what McCarthy refers to as an analytic learner. An analytic learner “perceives information abstractly and processes it reflectively.” According to McCarthy, an analytic learner may actually enjoy ideas more than people.\(^{29}\) This mode of learning corresponds well with kataphatic spiritual types. Such types seek to know God and imagine that God, in some sense, can be known. However, because *lectio divina* encourages readers to consider ways to apply the text as well as to encourage them to open themselves to the voice of God and meditate on the words they read, the *apophatic* element is also represented.

The small group meeting fits the learning style of the imaginative learner. Such learners do well in groups where they can share ideas and hear the responses of others, and they also correspond well with the kataphatic spiritual types. Those from other disciplines have taken note of the value of group learning. For instance, Frederick

\(^{29}\) Lee, 93.
Aquino, in writing about epistemology, argues that since no one person can know everything, each must rely on a vast range of specialists for knowledge. Therefore, knowledge is enhanced when those others, exercising epistemic virtues, come together.³⁰

As relationships are nurtured over time, possibilities for growth occur because the development of such relationships provides a safe environment for learners. As relationships are nourished, each one in a group feels safe in allowing pre-existing ideas to be challenged. This feeling of safety allows each one to feel more comfortable in opening up to new possibilities. Ironically, some of the best learning comes when there is diversity in the group.³¹ No doubt this is due to the push back that occurs when the group is diverse rather than the group-think that may be prevalent when the group is homogeneous.

Common Sense Learners and Dynamic Learners learn best when they are able to test what knowledge they have gained in real world environments. Such learning has been a staple of education since the days of Aristotle. He argued that “Anything that we have to learn to do we learn by the actual doing of it.”³² The final piece of the exercise integrated this learning style. Individuals attempted to actually do what they had learned and then process that action with the others at the next meeting. This learning mode fits well with the spirituality type known as the apophatic mind.

³¹ Piercy, 34.
Each of the activities that the listeners engaged in are intended not only to help them know more, but to know implicitly and then to move from knowing to being. Michael Polanyi argued that there is a kind of knowledge that one acquires through the practice of an activity. For instance, one may study the physics of riding a bicycle but not be able to mount a bike and ride it down the street. Those who learn to ride the bike put physics to work, turning the wheel inward when they are about to fall. The more the bike is ridden, the more the skill is acquired. Those who have mastered the bicycle have learned well enough how to ride that they no longer think about how it is to be done. They simply do it. They have tacit knowledge.33

Rodney Clapp builds upon Polanyi’s case and argues for tacit holiness.34 In the same way that people may acquire knowledge through learning and practicing, they may also acquire holiness. When people attempt to practice holiness or transformation with those with whom they interact during the week, they are formed by their actions. They are also being formed by the interactions that they have within the group. There is potential for disagreements within the group, which could lead to serious conflict and behavior that would be anything but holy. But there is also potential for individuals to practice submission, love, respect, and a host of other virtues that would lead to holiness both individually and corporately.

As can be seen, individuals who engage in these activities are more likely to learn and to be transformed by the text and the sermon. Such learning, however, is not limited

34 Rodney Clapp, “Tacit Holiness: The Importance of Bodies and Habits in Doing Church,” in Embodied Holiness, eds. Samuel M. Powell and Michael E. Lodahl (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 62-78.
to individuals, but also lends itself to the formation of groups. When individuals engage in these activities with others, the group, as the body of Christ, begins to tacitly take on the holiness of Christ. It is at this point that both individuals and the group move from knowing to being.

This structure provided an environment where the sermon could be enhanced so that individuals could be more fully formed into the image of Christ. It took advantage of the varied learning styles and spiritual types found within a congregation. It also caused the listeners to be more proactive in listening to the sermon as well as active in the process of applying what they learned. This structure provides an environment in which there are greater possibilities for the preaching event to contribute to transformation.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

Introduction

The goal of this project was to enhance the sermon experience for listeners so that they could be more fully transformed into the image of Christ. This project was measured for effectiveness using the triangulation of field notes, a questionnaire, and an interview by an IE. This chapter provides data on those meetings and evaluates the results based upon those data. The chapter also reflects on Wesley’s theology and practices and the implications of those for this project. Specifically, the emphasis given by Wesley to personal devotional time, the value of small groups for transformation, the importance of preaching to those who are already Christians, and the necessity of putting faith into practice are all discussed.

Beginning with the first session, the NPO took field notes so that I would be able to observe the body language and interaction of group members. These notes averaged seven handwritten pages per session. I evaluated these notes within fifteen minutes of the meeting and added my own observations to them. I began looking for themes in these notes after the first session, but remained open to the emergence of other themes in the coming sessions. Group members received the questionnaire at the end of the seventh

\footnote{My primary NPO, Lisa Barbarick, had to attend a conference for her work on the night of the seventh session, so Becky VanShoubrouek, a friend and fellow church member, took notes at the seventh session. VanShoubrouek is a trained counselor and therefore understands the importance of confidentiality. As with Barbarick, VanShoubrouek has an eye for details. I provided them both with the same training.}

\footnote{A detailed description of the sessions may be found in appendix M.}
session. The four questions asked on the questionnaire correspond to the four categories of measurement discussed below.

As previously noted, the interview was conducted by Dr. Bill Gandin, senior pastor of the First United Methodist Church of Nacogdoches. The session for the interview had to be moved from Monday, November 18th to Thursday November 21st due to an unexpected scheduling conflict for Dr. Gandin. Because of this change of date, one person did not arrive at the meeting on time, despite the emails I sent reminding participants of the date change. After a phone call, this person arrived and the meeting began. Due to the illness of a child who was out of town, one other participant was unable to attend the interview.

I introduced Dr. Gandin to the group and explained that he would be interviewing the group about their experience. I also explained Dr. Gandin’s qualifications to them as well as the pertinence of his Wesleyan background to the project. I encouraged them to be candid with Dr. Gandin and not to concern themselves with the success or failure of my project. After this I led the group in prayer, left the room, and allowed Dr. Gandin to conduct the interview. The interview session lasted approximately an hour.

The triangulation measurement is intended to provide a thicker description of the project and this chapter will demonstrate its effectiveness. The triangulation of the data in this project was limited to four categories: lectio divina, group learning, resonating with the sermon, and implementation of the lesson. In the following section I will present the process for each angle, followed by a discussion of the group experience with the process
and the relationship that it has to Wesley. I will conclude with an analysis of the success or failure of the project.

**The Impact of *Lectio Divina***

The Process

On Monday evening, September 30, I held an orientation meeting in which I passed out a packet of materials that would help the group through the process.³ We read through and discussed the materials together. There was a little uneasiness about *lectio divina* because the experience was foreign to everyone in the group. However, after answering some questions and practicing *lectio divina* with Galatians 5:22-23, the group seemed to have a better understanding of the exercise. I also passed out journals that I had purchased for each member of the group. Several had journaled at some point in the past. One person has been journaling since 1972. Another person showed up with his own journal. While the others had no experience with journaling, they understood the expectations. Journals were used to enhance the experience of *lectio divina*.

The expectation for *lectio divina* was that each would take a minimum of fifteen minutes a day to practice *lectio divina* on the text that we were working through that week. If they did this once each day and then twice on one of the days, they would be able to go through the whole process twice before we met again. Although this was the expectation that I expressed, I was not surprised when no one actually made it through the whole process twice. However, they all did go through the process at least once and this did help them to more fully resonate with the sermon on Sunday.

³ This included the schedule, an explanation of *lectio divina*, and an explanation of journaling. See appendices B, C, and D.
Group Experience

One of the first discoveries in Scripture that came from the *lectio divina* exercises was the recognition of something in the text that participants had not previously noticed. In week 1 of the exercise, group members read through Romans 5:1-11. At the following meeting one participant said, “I was always taught that we are saved through his death, but in this reading I learned that we are saved through his life.” A woman in the group had a similar experience, stating that she had never associated the resurrection of Jesus with our reconciliation to God.

Two examples of experiences by group members are common with those who immerse themselves in the word. Although they may have read the Scripture numerous times before, the practice of repetition with the text brings out facets of the text that had made little or no impact previously. In both the questionnaire and the interview with the IE, group members expressed that the repetition of the reading provided insight that a casual reading does not provide. It allowed the text to have an emotional impact upon them and prompted them to think about how the text applied to situations throughout their day.

In the group sessions they often reflected upon their experiences during the week and how the text impacted those experiences. For instance, in reflecting on Ephesians 2:1-10 in week 2, one participant was struck by the comment about the “ruler of the kingdom of the air.” The notion of demonic forces in the air caused him to reflect on the ubiquitous nature of evil in the world and in his own life. He said, “Satan is everywhere

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4 I list this as week 1, 2, etc. because it was during that week that group members read the text. We actually discussed it during the following session. For example, if it was read in week 1, it was discussed in session 2.
there is air.” This, in turn, helped to him to reflect on ways that Satan may be creating havoc in his own life. This experience with the text cast challenges he was facing into a new light. Another participant agreed, remarking that this same text prompted him to think about how Satan may be working in his own life. He said that Satan is “trying to get people to not pay attention.”

It was evident in our weekly meetings that each one was thinking more deeply about the text because of the time they were spending with it. For instance, in discussing Ephesians 2:1-10, one person reflected on the statement that God was preparing in advance for us to do good works. She thought that this statement raised big questions. There was a general consensus among the group that the exercise caused them to look at the text more closely. One of the participants said, “lectio divina has helped me to slow down when reading Scripture.” Another commented, “When just reading through the Scripture, it is difficult to fully understand the message in just one pass. Continually reading and thinking on the verse, however, brings a better understanding and true knowledge of the message.”

In week 3 participants engaged Titus 2:11-14 and began seeing grace as that which teaches us. As had already happened, group members were seeing and hearing things from the text that they had never noticed before. One participant said that he thought that it said “taught us” not “teaches us.” Others had similar thoughts and the group engaged in a discussion about the process of being formed. Still others wondered what it meant that grace had not appeared before Christ (v. 11).
In week 4 questions were again raised as participants looked more closely at the text (2 Peter 1:3-9). One woman asked what it means to “increase in measure”? Another asked about the phrase “mutual affection” and wondered if this was not simply “brotherly love.” One person, after hearing that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness, said that she began making a list of all of the things that God had given to her. In reply to this another responded, “He has given us a way of escape.” Two others noticed how the list Peter provides seems to build, culminating in love.

In week 5 group members reflected on their reading of Jude 1-10 and expressed how they thought about the implications for themselves and others. In verse 3 Jude wrote that he wanted to write about the salvation that they shared, but felt compelled to write about the false teachers. One participant felt compelled to listen more closely for God’s calling when he read that Jude felt compelled to write about contending for the faith when he would rather have written about something else. The word “contend” in verse 3 was significant for another. He said that this indicated to him that “You don’t just go along with what is taught, but that you are aggressive with it.” There were also reflections on how these texts might apply, given contemporary events. Specifically, the discussion about false teachers in Jude 1-10 caused several to reflect upon the Church of Wells.

A section that stood out to one reader in this text was the comment that “these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct—as irrational animals do—will destroy them” (Jude 10). It struck her that

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5 Wells is a community close to Nacogdoches. The Church of Wells has made national headlines because they appear “cultish” due to some of their practices. For more information on the controversy surrounding this church, go to http://www.ktre.com/story/23925010/east-texans-rally-to-bring-home-church-of-wells-member.
those who cheapen grace are destroyed by the very things that they build their lives upon. The obvious question was the ways in which we might cheapen grace as well. Sometimes readers would get caught up in something not germane to the topic, but it was something that intrigued them. This was the case of the person who said that he spent a lot of time thinking about the archangel Michael.

In week 6 the group read Matthew 25:21-35 and thought more about the implications for themselves. For instance, several participants wrestled with being able to forgive others knowing that the text says that they would not be forgiven if they did not forgive others. The text also caused readers to think about how Jesus extended grace to outcasts, which prompted them to think about the outcasts in their own world.

Participants journaled throughout this process and found journaling to be helpful in their lectio divina exercise. It was useful for keeping their thoughts in one place so that they could look back on them. Some referred to their journals in the group meetings. A few times people actually read something from their journals and often wrote in their journals during meetings. One participant said that it “helped by writing down the words or phrases that stood out—whether the text was confusing or made an emotional impact.”

Although I am not aware of the actual learning styles of the group members, the comments above are indicative of analytic learners. Participants processed the ideas by

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6 Although there were a few occasions where participants read from their journals, this was the exception more than the rule. At the orientation meeting I told the group that they could share from their journals, but that they were not expected to do so. I believe that their unwillingness to share was because they went into the process expecting that their journals would be private and therefore wrote information in them that they were not interested in sharing. However, if the group had continued on together, they might have developed sufficient intimacy that they would have been willing to read their journals to one another.
thinking through them and sometimes doing some research to see what the experts said on the subject. In so doing they were also reflecting the kataphatic mind spiritual type. However, other comments, such as the one by the person who wondered how Satan might be creating havoc in his own life, indicate that their experience of the text demonstrates the presence of the kataphatic heart spiritual type as well. The discussion about the challenge to forgive others demonstrates the way that group members engaged the text with the apophatic mind.

Although some group members struggled with certain aspects of the lectio divina exercise (specifically, contemplatio), they found the experience of lectio divina rewarding. The reward came to them not only because they understood the text better through a reasoned approach to Scripture, but because they experienced the texts through varied learning styles and spiritual types. In the words of Eugene Peterson, the exercise allowed them to chew on the text as a dog worries a bone.\(^7\) The text resonated with their experiences, reminded them of songs, impacted their emotions, and moved them to action.

*Lectio Divina* in Light of Wesley

The experience of the group members was precisely what Wesley was seeking when he encouraged a commitment to engaging Scripture. As we saw earlier, he urged John Trembath, one of his lay preachers, to read Scripture daily. He recognized, as members of our group discovered, that such a practice requires discipline, but he also recognized that such discipline will be rewarded with the joy of discovering God and self.

\(^7\) Peterson, 1-2.
in the reading of Scripture. It is in Scripture that we discover the character of God and it is Scripture that penetrates the soul (Hebrews 4:12).

In the preface to his notes on the Old Testament, Wesley laid out a way of reading Scripture daily that would provide the most benefit. (1) Set aside time every morning and evening to read Scripture. (2) Read some part of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. (3) Attempt to discern the whole will of God. (4) Attempt to see the connection between the reading and the grand doctrines of Scripture, including original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, and inward and outward holiness. (5) The reading should both begin and end with prayer, understanding that Scripture is the sword of the Spirit and therefore cannot be understood completely without the guidance of the Spirit. (6) Readers should pause from time to time and examine themselves in regard to the Scripture. If they feel enlightened by their reading, they should implement what they have learned without delay.

As the primary source for knowing God, Wesley was convinced that immersing ourselves in God’s word would allow the thoughts and ways of God to rule our tempers, words, and actions because the more we engage the word of God, the more we begin to think in godly ways. Group members had this experience as they attempted to implement what they were learning each week. The text before them and the topic of grace were swimming through their minds throughout the week.

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8 Wesley, Letter to John Trembath.
Group Learning

The Process

The group meetings each week followed a fairly standard pattern. Group members would arrive and speak with one another and with me until I announced that we were beginning and opened the group with a prayer. I followed this with a question about their implementation of the previous text during the past week. After this I read the current text that they had been working through during the week and asked them to tell me about their *lectio divina* experience. A discussion followed about how this text could be practiced/implemented. I challenged each participant to choose one of the options and to practice it in the coming week. After this I read the text for the coming week and closed with a prayer. Group members sometimes stayed around to visit with one another and with me afterwards.

Group meetings were generally well attended. I felt that it was unrealistic to expect them to have perfect attendance. I knew that sickness, demands of children and employment requirements could keep participants away on occasion. I shared with the group that my expectations were that they make every attempt to be at the meetings, but that I understood if something beyond their control caused them to miss. There were only two sessions where all of the participants were present, but only one person missed two sessions and no one missed more than that.

The room was set up with enough chairs in a circle for each participant, the NPO, and me so that each person was forced to sit next to another. Upon request, tables were brought in for the second session and were utilized for the remaining sessions. There
were four tables set up to form a square so that group members continued to sit where they faced one another, albeit in a square rather than a circle.

Most participants arrived early or on time for the orientation meeting (session 1). A couple of people were a few minutes late. One person arrived nine minutes late and was reluctant to come in. There were other activities going on in the building so she may have been unsure if she was in the right room. Group members introduced themselves. Most of them seemed to know one another, but there were a few who were unacquainted. They all shared what kind of work they did or where they went to school, whether they were married and whether they had children as well as their religious heritage.

After the orientation, group meetings followed the pattern discussed above. The person who was significantly late in session 1 continued this pattern. While it meant that this participant missed out on some of the early discussion, it did not adversely affect the meetings or the project. One person arrived for the meetings early each week because she brought her two children with her and they ate their dinner at the church building. The children were old enough that she was able to put them in a side room for them to work on their homework while she was in the meeting. Most others arrived just before the start of the meeting. Meetings typically started at least five minutes late to allow for those running a couple of minutes late to arrive and to allow for interaction between group members.

There were some interactions between group members before and after every session. At some point each one spoke with me. Often a person would speak to all who were present. On other occasions there were individual conversations. Only one person in
the group interacted very little on an individual basis with fellow group members, although this person interacted with them as a group both during and after the sessions.\textsuperscript{10} In fact, this person offered the most amount of meaningful comments during the sessions.\textsuperscript{11}

The conversations between group members during the sessions were warm and cordial. Agreement and encouraging words were offered when comments were made. They all seemed to have some willingness to openly discuss some things despite the fact that a few of them were not well known to one another. However, there was no disagreement or conflict as one might expect in a group of friends who had been together much longer. No one in this group felt comfortable enough to express disagreement.

However, their comfort level with one another grew as the weeks progressed. In session 4, one person mentioned being in a serious automobile accident during the week. After the group was over, a person of a significantly different age approached him and spoke with him about the accident. The two were unknown to each other before the group began meeting. Despite the diversity within the group, a sense of intimacy was developing. In fact, in the interview with the IE, group members expressed appreciation for the diversity within the group.

The theme of the texts and sermons was about grace, thus much of the discussion focused on this subject. In response to questions by me, members of the group shared their personal as well as church experiencea with teachings on grace. One person mentioned it was pounded into his head at catechism that grace is what saves a person.

\textsuperscript{10} Appendix N.
\textsuperscript{11} Appendix O.
Most of the others spoke of not being taught about grace in their church upbringing very much, if at all. They also spoke of ways that they could implement these lessons on grace, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

Group Experience

In a very short time participants in the focus group grew in their relationships with one another, evidenced by the joking that occurred between group members, the transparency that slowly developed, and the confession of struggles that each one had with the text as well as the practices. The fostering of relationships created an atmosphere in which group members could learn from one another and help each other grow into Christlikeness.¹²

During the orientation of session 1, I was explaining the use of journals and encouraged participants to use their journals during the sermon for notes. This prompted one man to ask if he would look silly journaling during the sermon. A woman in the group queried about why he might feel silly: “Do you have Wonder Woman on your journal or something?” she asked. The light-hearted banter in the group continued and grew as group members grew to know one another better.

Each week group members revealed something about themselves to the rest of the group. In session 2, one of the men said that he never thought that he was worthy. Another confessed that his life had been a pendulum swinging between Christlikeness and following his own way while a woman expressed that she felt guilty every day. Still another woman said that she was never taught to have a relationship with Christ, but grace taught her to think of him more as a person to talk to and receive an answer.

¹² See appendix P for an excerpt of a group discussion.
In session 3 I asked the group about their experience with grace. During the sermon that week, I spoke of some who were brought from the depths of the pit by God’s grace and others who have been kept out of the pit by his grace. Three participants specifically noted that they never felt as if they were in the bottom of the pit and that God had been at work keeping them out. Others nodded in agreement.

In the 4th session a participant spoke of the frustration that came with working on a project with another group. He brought this up regarding the implementation of Ephesians 2:1-10. A participant who teaches school mentioned having a really rough week with a student. Still another participant spoke of difficulties with her daughter. In session 5 one participant confessed that he did not learn anything from the previous week’s practice, that he thought that some people were not deserving of grace, and that there are some to whom he would give the world and others that he would not spit on.

In session 6 one of the participants confessed that she said something mean to her mother and felt compelled to call her and apologize. One of the men shared with the group that he needed to do a better job of following through with things that God puts on his heart. This session revolved around the false teachers discussed by Jude. One of the group members shared that she was angry about the false teachers. Her anger was related to some friends who had been duped by false teachers.

The growing camaraderie could be seen by session 7, when three members of the group shared some very difficult experiences they had dealt with or were dealing with that made offering forgiveness very challenging. This experience prompted one person to respond to the questionnaire with this: “I really enjoyed hearing how one verse can affect
different people in different ways. It also made me understand the others a little better and feel as though we had all shared some things together that gave us some sort of a bond that we hadn’t had before.”

In addition to the growing friendships participants were developing with one another, there was mutual learning that was occurring. As individuals would hear of another’s experience, they often offered input from their own experience. This led one participant to say, “Discussion was helpful to me because it brought other ideas. These thoughts made some things click. It would not have made sense otherwise, which made it easier to remember and live out the message.” Another commented that “talking through things helps to gain clarity of mind.”

These are examples of the ways in which group members continued to open up about themselves and confess the challenges that they were facing. In doing this they allowed others some entry into their lives and allowed them to speak into their lives as well. Each week group members reflected on the text together and offered insights to the text. Unlike Bible class sessions where this often happens without any critical reflection on the text, these group members spent the week immersed in the text and therefore drew deeply from their study when offering their interpretations. As they expressed their individual interpretations of the text, they were teaching one another about the text.

The above comments reflect the thought processes and learning style of imaginative learners. These learners are always seeking collaboration. They value listening and sharing ideas with others as well as sensing, feeling, and watching what is taking place. For this reason Lee sees a correspondence between the imaginative learner
and the kataphatic heart spiritual type.\textsuperscript{13} The comments on the questionnaire indicate that this process resonated well with those of this learning style and spiritual type.

On the whole my expectations for the group were met. The group formed a bond that enabled them to encourage one another. As a result they now often look for one another on Sunday mornings. They also learned from each other. Hearing the experiences of others prompted participants to try an implementation that others had practiced. As a result of their time together, there was growth into the image of Christ.

\textbf{Group Learning in Light of Wesley}

In 1745 John Wesley attempted an experiment in which he did field preaching without establishing societies. By 1748 he called off the experiment. It became apparent to him that "the preacher cannot give proper instructions to those who are convinced of sin unless he has opportunities of meeting them apart from the mixed, unawakened multitude."\textsuperscript{14} What he discovered was that those being converted by the field preaching were being lost not long after. He later wrote, “I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that are 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 and the consequence is that nine in ten of the once-awakened are now faster asleep than ever.”\textsuperscript{15} This experience pushed Wesley to form his societies. Wesley, however, could not be at every society meeting, and he soon

\textsuperscript{13} Lee, 102.


came to realize that society members, to a certain degree, were going to need to help each other.

I began this project with the same assumption as Wesley: that the gospel knows no religion but that which is social. Christians are intended to live out their faith in relationship with one another. Throughout the New Testament Christians are encouraged to help one another in their relationship with God through encouragement (2 Cor. 13:11), bearing with one another (Eph. 4:2), forgiving each other (Col. 3:13), and admonishing one another (Col. 3:16). Wesley attempted to utilize his groups towards that end.

Wesley recognized the importance of Christians helping one another grow in their faith. He experienced great help in his own faith from those such as his mother, August Spangeberg, Peter Böhler and others. This was obviously very important for him as early as his college years, when he met in a small group with his brother to discuss spiritual topics. For this reason Wesley was convinced that spiritual formation would truly happen in the groups more than anywhere else. Whether in his holy club experience or in the established societies of Methodism, Wesley intended that Christians would teach, encourage, and admonish one another.

Wesley designed the societies to be gatherings of love and encouragement in the common faith. In describing a group he wrote, “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.”16 The groups celebrated

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16 Wesley, “A Plain Account of a People Called Methodists,” Works, 9, 256.
love feasts, practiced confession of sin, and group members edified one another.\textsuperscript{17} Such practices were intended to help each group member move towards perfection.

However, Wesley had no qualms about correcting others, even to the point of being blunt or rude. He also encouraged those in Methodist societies to take up the same approach. In his sermon, “The Duty of Reproving Our Neighbor,” Wesley provided specific direction on how to go about rebuking a brother or sister. While this may strike some as harsh, Wesley insisted that love demands that we reproach others for error that will lead to sin.\textsuperscript{18} The reason for Wesley’s emphasis on admonishment was his concern that those who were in the groups might settle for nominal Christianity. He intended that the bar of spiritual formation be held high and that each group member would hold the others to the high standard. While the focus group had enough time to develop the intimacy needed for admonishment, they found the encouragement and mutual instruction to be valuable.

\textit{Resonating with the Sermon}

\textit{The Process}

The group began practicing their \textit{lectio divina} exercise with a text on Monday of each week, and on the following Sunday preached from that text. Participants brought their journals to worship and wrote in them if they saw the need. On the next evening the group gathered and discussed with one another their experience of hearing the sermon. They explored how it resonated with their own study and how it might move them to be transformed.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. 261-68.

There was a consensus that doing the *lectio divina* exercise helped them to be more attentive to the sermon. In the interview with the IE, group members said that their time with the Scripture helped them with listening to the sermon, not just hearing it. They felt that they would be more inclined to remember the lesson after having spent time in the text themselves than if they had not. One woman shared that she and her husband discussed the sermon on Sunday afternoon and she found that he did not receive as much from it as she had. She was convinced that it was because she prepared herself to hear it. On the questionnaire one person wrote, “I’m more inclined to write notes and listen well and remember what I’ve heard.”

Preparing themselves to hear the sermon caused participants to look forward to the preaching event. They wanted to see how the lesson taught in the sermon compared to their own reading of the text. In the interview with the IE, one person commented, “Without this exercise, listening to the sermon was sometimes like ‘whac-a-mole.’ This process let us know ‘where the mole would pop out.’”

It is not uncommon for a church member to be asked about the content of the sermon during lunch on Sunday afternoon and the member not being able to recall what the sermon entailed without some prompting. My expectation for this project was that, if participants prepared themselves to hear the sermon, they would not have this experience. I analyzed my field notes to see if this was the case. While it is difficult to know just how many would have responded to questions about that morning’s sermon with a blank stare, my findings suggest that doing the *lectio divina* exercises before I preached the sermon
helped participants to be more greatly impacted by the sermon.\textsuperscript{19}

One advantage of teaching a Bible class over preaching a sermon is that the teacher usually receives feedback from class members. When feedback is received, the teacher can see whether the instruction that is given is actually resonating with the audience. If it is not, the instructor can make an adjustment so as to better communicate the lesson. The sermon typically does not have this capability.

While it was not the intent of this project to have the group help form the sermon, the feedback I received from the participants during the weekly meetings helped me understand if the message I was trying to communicate about God’s grace was being heard as I intended. When I felt it was not being heard properly, I made adjustments in the next week’s sermon. One participant felt that this was happening. On the questionnaire this participant expressed that “it was as if maybe my feelings were thought about too.”\textsuperscript{20}

From the comments made in the weekly group meeting as well as on the questionnaire and in the interview with the IE, it is clear that participants resonated with the sermon more fully due to their preparation to hear the sermon. Along with the other activities of the project, this has contributed to their transformation. As one participant stated on the questionnaire regarding the preparation for the sermon, “It made me more attentive and a better person.”

\textsuperscript{19} Appendix Q.
\textsuperscript{20} At this point, my project intersected nicely with that of Allen Burris. While I did not intend to have the group help form the sermon as Dr. Burris did, this was sometimes the result. See Burris, “Sermon Preparation for Hearers.”
Group Experience

The series of lessons for this project were titled “His Grace Reaches Me.” In the first week the text for the sermon was Romans 5:1-11 and the title of the lesson was “Amazing Grace.” The sermon focus was “Despite our being enemies and traitors, Christ died for us.” The sermon function was “to move the audience to understand our complicity in the treason against God. Only when we understand how bad the bad news is will we understand the goodness of the good news.” The sermon ended with a video titled “Your Love Still Amazes Me.” There were different scenes from the life of Jesus in the video, which ended with his crucifixion. Throughout the video, passages of Scripture about people amazed by Jesus appeared on the screen.

In the group discussion one participant said that she loved the analogy of treason and really understood it because of reading the text. Another said that he understood the point of the question “How much treason can I get away with?” This participant commented that he has often walked close to the line. A third said that he felt he really understood the sermon, but he was blown away by the video. Several mentioned a sense of entitlement in themselves and others. These comments suggest that both the sermon focus and the function were clear.

In week two the text of the sermon was Ephesians 2:1-10. The title of the sermon was “Saving Grace.” The sermon focus was “God’s grace can pull us out of the bottom of a pit or keep us from getting there, but in either case God seeks to do more than help us escape the pit; he wants to shape us by his grace.” The sermon function was “To help the audience see that God’s purpose for us is not only to rescue us but to make us into
something beautiful as well.” I showed a video clip from *Les Misérables*. It was the scene of Jean Valjean’s release by the bishop. The song after the sermon was “Something Beautiful.”

During the sermon I commented that grace could save us from the bottom of the pit, but could also keep us out of the pit. Those who have been taught a good way of life by their parents were given grace to avoid the bottom of the pit. This prompted one mother in the group to say that she never thought of grace as saving us from getting into the bottom of the pit, like a mother teaching her children how to live. This is an example of how group members were beginning to grasp a thicker understanding of grace. One participant was already tracking with the theme before the sermon was preached. She had written down the song “Something Beautiful” in her journal before worship that morning. After hearing the sermon one group member said that due to his own reading of the Scripture, “Right off the bat I understood the sermon better.” This, of course, is precisely the point of the process.

In week 3 the text of the sermon was Titus 2:11-14. The title of the sermon was “Grace for Now and Later.” The sermon focus was “Salvation is about sanctification and justification.” The sermon function was “to encourage the congregation to see the importance of sanctification.” During the sermon I used one of the group participants and his wife as demonstrators. He held a sign that read “Justification” on it while she held one that read “Sanctification.” At one point I had him stand in front of her to illustrate that we often allow justification to trump sanctification. I then had them both turn their signs over to show that both signs read “Salvation.” During the sermon I continued the theme from
the previous week that God makes us into something beautiful in the way that a potter shapes clay.

This theme resonated well with the group. One group member stated, “I’m glad that we are still on the potter’s wheel. I am not satisfied with where I am.” Still another said that she was concerned that her daughter would jump off of the potter’s table. A third said, “I really liked the last question. The clay had better get ready because it hurts. It is not always a gentle process. Sometimes it needs to hurt.” One, however, was not so sure. He said that he had never thought of molding as a continuous process. But the idea of a shaping as a process stimulated good thinking and good conversation. It led one group member to ask, “Are we still perfecting?” This was an intriguing question, given that Wesley is the theological lens for the project, yet I did not discuss Wesley in the sermons nor did I mention the word “perfect.”

The text for the sermon in week 4 was 2 Peter 1:3-9. The title for the sermon was “Growing in Grace.” The sermon focus was “Transformation into the image of Christ happens when we cooperate with God and what he has given us.” The sermon function was to “encourage the congregation to understand the need for growth into transformation.” I began by discussing the ongoing conflict between grace and works. I said that some think of God’s grace and our responsibility like two oars on a boat, but I went on to say that this analogy makes what we do in some way equal to God. “A better way of looking at it,” I said, “is to say that God has given us a boat. We could row nowhere if God had not given us the boat.”
I then turned to the text and used the Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt as an example of someone who added to what God had given him. He was certainly given the gift of speed, but he honed that gift through practice. I pointed out that we are not formed into the image of Christ to gain salvation, but that formation into the image of Christ is salvation. I closed by telling a story of accidently throwing away a Christmas present that my son received one year. The point was that if we do not “add to” what God has given us, we are doing no more than throwing the gift away.

One participant said, “During the part of the sermon where Curtis talked about the oars and the row boat, I leaned over to someone and said that this made sense. Then Curtis debunked it and I agreed with him.” When he said this everyone in the room laughed. This analogy struck a chord with two others who appreciated the emphasis on God’s part being much greater than ours. Others said that the Usain Bolt analogy was helpful. Their discussion revealed that they all understood that they needed to do something with what God has given them.

The text for week five was Jude 1-10. The title of the sermon was “Cheap Grace.” The sermon focus was “Anyone who turns the grace of God into a license to sin has seriously misunderstood grace.” The sermon function was to “challenge the congregation to think differently about grace.” I began with a picture of a dilapidated house on the screen and spoke of it as “your house.” I then spoke of someone offering to pay to refurbish the house that you could never afford to refurbish. However, when the workers showed up to do the work, you were busy destroying the house with a sledge hammer, claiming that it was because of grace.
I used the house as an analogy for our lives, which are beyond our own repair. God seeks to renovate my house, but because I have bought into the idea that salvation is what happens to me after I die, I am not concerned about what happens to my house now. In fact, I can actually trash it. Since “all is of God,” God will refurbish it after I die. I followed this by telling the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his experience with the German church and the way that they cheapened God’s grace. I concluded by saying that grace is saving us by refurbishing us now.

In week 6 the sermon was taken from Matt.18:21-35. The title of the sermon was “Transforming Grace.” The sermon focus was “when people really receive grace, it transforms them.” The sermon function was to “challenge the listeners to ask themselves if they were being transformed by the grace that God has given them.” I began with an image of chocolate chip cookies on the screen. I pointed out that while most of us would think these to be good and would be happy to receive them, those with Celiac disease have bodies that are unable to receive them because their bodies cannot process the gluten and it destroys their intestines. I used this analogy to point out that people can be given grace, but this does not mean that they have received grace.

I demonstrated that this was the case of the servant in the text who was forgiven much but could not forgive a little. I closed the lesson with a video of some middle school boys in Michigan who secretly planned for a learning-disabled teammate to score a touchdown in a football game. When asked about it afterwards, one of the boys said, “I would have never thought of such a thing.” The learning-disabled boy was changed by the experience, but so was the boy who would have never thought about doing it, but did
it anyway. The point was that when God’s grace passes through us to others, it has a way of transforming us in the process.

Due to the large amount of time spent on the three who were wrestling with forgiving others, there was not as much discussion about the sermon during this week. One person did say that the sermon helped him to be softer in grace. Another said that it seemed to him that forgiving others is a requirement for getting into heaven. The group then wrestled with how this meshed with the idea of growing in grace. Although there was little discussion about the sermon in the sixth week, the overall discussion about the sermon and the interaction of participants with the sermon suggests that each week the sermon focus was understood and that the sermons achieved their function.

The sermon takes advantage of those whose dominant learning style is that of an analytic learner. According to LeFever, analytic learners “expect the teacher to be the primary information giver, while they sit and carefully assess the value of the information presented.”21 As with some aspects of lectio divina, this learning style resonates with the kataphatic mind. Group members were all accustomed to learning this way, having experienced a number of sermons in church and lectures in classrooms. However, unlike typical sermons, but like typical school lectures, participants prepared themselves before the lesson, which allowed them to be more engaged while listening to the lesson.

Hearing the Sermon in Light of Wesley

As noted in chapter 4, John Wesley is widely known for his field preaching. Yet Wesley himself saw that field preaching was not always effective. Despite being rejected by Anglican churches and forced to preach outside, we find that many of Wesley’s

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21 Lee, 94.
sermons were actually preached indoors and to his societies. Wanda Smith, secretary to Albert Outler and compiler of Wesley’s sermons for Outler, “estimates that the overwhelming proportion of his preaching throughout his lifetime, perhaps more than ninety percent, was to the Methodist societies.”

In other words, despite all of his field preaching, Wesley gave the lion’s share of his time to preaching to his societies, particularly in the latter part of the movement.

Wesley explained why this was so: “1. At first we preached almost wholly to unbelievers. To those, therefore, we spake almost continually of remission of sins through the death of Christ, and the nature of faith in His blood . . . 2. But those in whom the foundation is already laid, we exhort to go on to perfection, which we did not see so clearly at first . . . 3. Yet we now preach, and that continually, faith in Christ as the Prophet, Priest, and King . . .”

The latter period of the movement called for Wesley to address topics that pertained to those who had already converted but needed to be more fully trained in righteousness.

While the approach to the audience might have varied, Wesley continually claimed that the message did not. The primary goal was to save souls. He often spoke of the three steps or movements towards the saving of souls: repentance, faith, and holiness. The goal of the preaching was to move his audience towards perfection. It did not matter whether the audience was that of those in the field preaching or those in the societies. It only mattered what step was necessary and what language one might speak to

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25 Ibid. 99.
the given audience. For this reason Wesley provides a good lens for this project. I preach
to a congregation of people who, for the most part, converted to Christ quite some time
ago. What is needed is an encouragement to grow in Christ and be transformed into the
image of Christ.

Implementation of the Lesson

The Process

The final component of the project was the implementation and practicing of
lessons that were learned. After participants engaged in their lectio divina exercises,
listened to the sermon, and learned from one another in the group meeting, they were to
implement what they learned so as to be shaped by their practices. This section reflects
on the practices of the participants and the overall effect that the practices, combined with
the other components, had on their transformation into the image of Christ.

Although Christians realize that they should take what they have learned from
sermons and implement them in their lives, they are often not deliberate about doing so.
The result is that the lesson to be learned is not learned very well because it has never
been implemented. This project called for participants to verbally express in group
meetings how these lessons could be implemented and then to challenge each one to
choose at least one implementation to carry out in the coming week.

As mentioned above, the theme of the lessons was “grace.” Participants read texts
and heard lessons on grace each week. When asked to offer ways that they could put
these texts and lessons into practice, they suggested “teaching grace, extending grace to
others, accepting grace, being thankful, loving God and others more, extending grace to
specific individuals with whom they were having some difficulty, doing self-analysis, looking for the ways in which God is extending grace to us, persevering with the qualities that are mentioned in 2 Peter, and being on the watch for false teachers.” During the next week they attempted to practice one of these.

Group Experience

At the beginning of each session, we discussed the experience of each with their implementations in the previous week. The first session was an orientation and the second session was the first time that the group met to discuss the text of the week and consider ways that they might practice what they had learned. Therefore, it was not until the third session that the group had an opportunity to discuss their experience of practicing the text. The most common way that participants attempted to implement the texts was by extending grace to others.

In session 3 a teacher spoke of practicing the lesson by extending more grace to her students. She tried to think about the background of the students, be more patient with them, and talk with them about what was happening. One boy in her class has two moms and the other kids often pick on him. One day in class he lashed out and kicked one of the other kids. While the kicking was not acceptable, she tried to be more understanding and gracious towards him. One man in the group coached a children’s soccer team and had an experience similar to that of the teacher. He said that he did not get the best group of kids and sometimes he had disciplinary problems. He tried to be more understanding of what might be going on in the home lives of the kids when they misbehaved.
One participant who works in a job that requires a great amount of confidentiality said that he extended grace at work by providing comforting, nonjudgmental words. Another said that someone had a flat tire in front of his house. The driver of the car was transporting another man who was a cancer patient. The group member felt that this was an opportunity to extend grace to another and he changed the tire.

Only two people offered responses in session 4 when asked about implementing the text. My assumption was that people were not used to being asked to practice what they learned and were certainly not used to being held accountable for it. The teacher from session 3 said that she had had a rough week with a particular student. She prayed to the Lord for help and the next day it went much better. A man said that he had failed in extending grace to another, but had received grace. A large limb had fallen in his yard and a neighbor came, cut it up, and hauled it all away. Although he did not give to someone else, his practice may have been in learning to receive the gift of another.

Session 5 saw greater participation. Two women mentioned having difficulties with co-workers. One said she was trying to give grace to her co-worker. The other said that she was trying to train a new person and those that were supposed to help her were hiding and being a hindrance. This reminded her not to be a hindrance to others. One teacher said that she had to discipline a child in her class and thought of it as an act of grace. Reflecting on a theme from one of the sermons, a woman in the group said, “Practicing these things has helped work out some lumps in my clay. It kept me from gossiping today.”
Previously the group discussed practicing hospitality as a way of giving grace. One of the men took this to heart and picked up a hitchhiker while traveling to another town. He fed the man breakfast at McDonalds. Another man in the group, however, saw himself as the recipient of the grace of hospitality. He was visiting in another town where he planned to move and was introduced to his future host. After knowing him for only an hour, the host gave a house key to the group member. The group member was shocked that the host was so gracious and trusting. Not everyone had success with their practice, however. One participant admitted that it was difficult for him to extend grace to certain people.

In session 6 only one person shared his implementation of the text. He said that he takes walks every morning and during one of those walks that week he found a baby goat stuck in a fence and his mother crying out for help. He went back home and retrieved some tools to free the goat. He wondered if you can give grace to a goat.

In session 7 the group began to explore more creative ways in which they could extend grace to others. In the previous group session we had discussed Jesus’ willingness to befriend those who would have been considered outcasts by others. During the week that followed, several of the group members attempted to do the same. One student spoke of eating with other students who were considered as oddballs by his group of friends. He also spoke of giving a ride to a man who attends our church who is essentially homeless. One of the women spoke of inviting this same man to sit with her family during worship. It was also during this week that a woman from the group sat with the groom’s family at
a wedding rehearsal because the family was small and seemed overshadowed by the bride’s family.

In each one of these cases, the participants were stretching themselves to do what made them uncomfortable but that which made the practice of grace more real in their lives. Each found the experience formational for them. The whole experience caused the participants to be more aware of those who needed grace given to them and how they might provide it. The more that they learned about how God extended grace to them, especially in the life and death of Jesus, the more they seemed to be moved to extend it to others. In this way they were experiencing the atonement in a subjective fashion, being transformed by the cross, not simply having God take a different attitude towards them because of the cross.

This final component seemed to have a big impact on the group. On the questionnaire one participant said, “I am certainly more formed into [the image] what Christ would have me to be; knowing it is a process and that it is daily work on my part, with his guidance.” The IE reported that the group said, “Perhaps the best part was the specific challenge each week to put into practice what we had learned, especially to live more like Christ. That included an awareness of the receiving of grace, and the opportunities given to share this grace with others.”

All of the components combined seemed to help the participants grow in their relationship with God and to be transformed. I listened each week as group members critiqued themselves as they thought about how God’s grace had been given to them and how they might extend that to others. In response to the IE’s question about how the
experience had changed them, one group member said, “I believe I am more forgiving and more understanding.” Another replied, “Forgiveness in daily living is now right at the top of my priorities.”

The implementation portion of the project appealed to common sense and dynamic learners. According to LeFevre, common sense learners want to “test theories in the real world, and to apply what has been learned,” while dynamic learners “excel in following hunches and sensing new directions and possibilities.”26 Attempts at controlling gossip, and practicing hospitality and forgiveness all demonstrate these learning styles. They also reflect the apophatic mind spiritual type, which seeks to love one’s neighbor and involve oneself in social action.

Sermon Implementation in Light of Wesley

As we saw in chapter 2, Wesley walked the line between Eastern and Western traditions when it came to how he thought about salvation. He wished to affirm that salvation was a work of God without removing human responsibility in sin or in the response to God’s work of grace. He was concerned with those who placed such emphasis on the work of God that they dismissed their own responsibility in becoming perfect. In fact, it seemed to Wesley, there was little interest in becoming perfect.

With the teaching of justification dominating the theological scene, the subject of sanctification was overshadowed. Much of Protestant theology insisted that sanctification could not be connected with salvation because making such a connection smacks of “works righteousness.” The preaching of grace from Luther onward insisted that salvation is all a work of God. Thus God justifies us despite our sin. For Wesley this not

26 Lee, 94-95.
only de-emphasized sanctification; it eliminated any responsibility on the part of the believer in becoming sanctified.

This is where Wesley was more in line with the Eastern teaching of synergism (cooperation with God). For Wesley, sanctification is essential to being a Christian, and he would question if a person was a real Christian who was not being sanctified. Furthermore, God has given humans the will and ability to pursue sanctification in their lives. Thus Wesley prescribed a number of practices that Christians were to engage in that would help them in being sanctified.

There were the encouragements to daily devotional practices that he gave to one of his preachers, mentioned in chapter 2. He also wrote about how Christians should use their time, which included being diligent in one’s calling, examining oneself, and beginning every work with prayer.27 He spoke of actions that were necessary for one to be sanctified, which included works of piety, such as prayer and fasting, and works of mercy, such as feeding the hungry and visiting those in prison.28

Wesley’s assumption was that as one practiced these works of piety and mercy, they would bring about sanctification in one’s life. In this project I have assumed with Wesley that transformation occurs when people practice the things that they have learned from Scripture. By engaging in these practices they acquire tacit knowledge and tacit holiness.

Conclusion

The primary question of this project was “Will this process of lectio divina, group meetings, listening to the sermon, and implementing lessons learned be effective in bringing about transformation in the lives of those who participate in this project?” The data from all three angles indicate that the answer is “yes”. In fact, the project seems to have been of such success that the IE has indicated that he will implement a similar process in his own church.

One reason that the project was successful was that the participants themselves took the project seriously. At the same time that I began this project, our church was moving to Sunday night small group meetings rather than a traditional Sunday evening service. These meetings are called “home groups.” I used this material with the home groups while also doing it with the focus group I formed for my project.

What I discovered through discussions with home group leaders as well as leading a home group myself (in addition to leading the focus group for the project) is that those involved in the home groups were not as disciplined about working through the process; therefore, they did not receive as much benefit. The focus group, however, took the project very seriously and gained a great deal from the experience.

The other component that I believe made the project successful is that it took advantage of the varying learning styles and spiritual types that are typically present within a congregation and therefore present within the group. While each of the four aspects helped participants in some way, it was the whole of all of them together that contributed to the success of the project. The result was that the sermon was enhanced for
the purpose of transformation in the listeners.

In addition, the testimony of Scripture, as focused through Wesley’s theology and practices, recommends optimistic expectations about the question, and implementation of the project. The effectiveness and benefit of a more disciplined engagement with Scripture, group process, and the sermon attest both to the wisdom and utility of Wesley’s practices.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this project I attempted to provide a process by which I could enhance the sermon experience for members of North Street so that the sermon would provide greater transformation for listeners. I have addressed the problem of a lack of process for transformation. I have also demonstrated how the theology and methodology of John Wesley was helpful for our process. In this final chapter I now address some conclusions about the project, including personal and professional development, as well as a discussion about the implications for North Street or others who may choose to utilize this process.

**Trustworthiness**

In this section I seek to answer questions regarding the trustworthiness of the project. How dependable and credible was the process? As the primary research tool, how might I have influenced the process? Would others within the process come to the same conclusions? How applicable might this process be to other situations? By answering these questions I intend to demonstrate the reliability of the interpretations.

The IE, questionnaire, and my own observation all indicate that the participants in the project grew in their relationship with God and developed in holiness as much as one might reasonably expect in a period of six weeks. This was demonstrated in an internal change as well as in a life change, both of which Wesley spoke about and worked
towards with his own groups. In other words, they developed in the holiness that Wesley sought and that Scripture encourages. In an attempt to verify these conclusions, I asked two of the participants and the NPO to review a draft of chapter 4. After doing so they affirmed the findings.

I had some concerns that my personal involvement could negatively impact the project. For instance, I was concerned that participants would seek to help me in the project and that this would alter the results. For this reason I emphasized on several occasions that the project did not need to succeed for me to graduate and that they should provide an honest assessment, not one that was meant to help me be successful. This is also why I did not want names on the questionnaires and I was not in the room while the IE interviewed the group. I believe that the participants provided a perspective that was honest and free from concerns about my personal interests in the project. The fact that in all three angles of view the participants shared the parts of the process that they found difficult indicates to me that they set aside concerns about me and attempted to be honest in their assessment.

Another concern I had was the impact of two mistakes I made with the project. The first was the definition of *lectio divina* that I provided to the group. I had used this definition for spiritual formation retreats in the past and it had worked quite well. However, in those cases the texts that were used were narrative texts. It became apparent almost immediately after the meetings started that this definition (especially that of *lectio*) was not going to work for the texts I had chosen. In response I modified the
definition of *lectio* verbally by encouraging group members to simply look for what the
text meant when they engaged in the *lectio* part of the process.

The second mistake was in the questionnaire. I asked about only four parts of the
process when I should have asked about more. This did not give me as much data as I
would have preferred. As a result, when I did the triangulation afterwards, I was forced to
limit it to the four questions on the questionnaire. I was limited because I had only two
angles, not three on the other material. I believe that the analysis with those four areas
was valid, but I could have measured so much more had I expanded the questionnaire.
For instance, I asked group members to practice journaling, but then failed to ask them
about that experience on the questionnaire.

Shortly before session 2 was to begin, I received a phone call that, no doubt, had
some impact on the group. A man in the congregation called to tell me that his wife had
just passed away. She had been in long-term care, but her death had not been expected.
He was very distraught when he called, and I was torn between holding the meeting as
planned and canceling it so that I could be with him. In the end I chose to continue with
the meeting, but I made contact with him immediately afterwards. During the session we
prayed for the family and I fielded questions about her death. I was emotionally torn
during this because I felt the tension of meeting the goals of the project and ministering to
a friend.

Most of what transpired through the process was not unexpected. However, the
participants reported an experience that I did find surprising. The group members
appreciated the fact that the group was diverse. In reflecting on my field notes, I could
see that they interacted well, but no one specifically mentioned that they found the diversity rewarding. Given the information provided in chapter 3 about the value of diversity, I should not have been surprised. Part of the reason I was surprised, however, is that most small group literature seems to insist that people of like kind should be in groups together, and I have continued to work off of that assumption. But that was not the opinion of this group.

There were two moments during the group meeting that made an impact on me personally. The first was when the student reported about sitting with a group of outcasts in the lunchroom at school. This was discussed in the previous meeting, but not suggested as an implementation. I was moved by this young person’s willingness to take some risks with personal social status and act in grace by sitting with this group. When we previously discussed it, I thought that someone might attempt to engage in this practice, but I confess that I never dreamed he would be the one.

The second moment came in session 7 when three people in the group shared personal experiences that made forgiving another very difficult. One of those in particular was impactful because it seemed to me that what had been done to the person was extremely hurtful and would be difficult for anyone to forgive. I was surprised that such intimacy had been achieved in such a short time.

The Significance of the Project

It is not uncommon for preachers to wonder about the impact of their preaching. Are people really connecting with the message? Are they actually taking anything that they hear and practicing it? Are they being changed by what they hear from the sermon
on Sunday morning? My experience with the process used in this project helped me be able to answer all of those questions.

The project demonstrates that when congregants are pro-active in listening to the sermon, they are much more likely to be transformed by the preaching event. In this project, group members practiced reading Scripture daily, believing that Scripture had the power to shape their lives in holiness. Such reading allowed them to be more engaged with the sermon so that the sermon could also contribute to their development in holiness. The method I utilized for this process was *lectio divina*, but another method might have worked as well.

In addition, the experience and reflection of group members demonstrates that the dynamic of group interaction contributes to the transformation of people into the image of Christ. This reflects the Wesleyan ideal of social holiness. As Wesley discovered, the preacher cannot be everywhere to follow up with the preaching event, but those who heard the sermon can support, encourage, and admonish one another in regard to the lesson given. In this sense the group becomes the teacher.

The project further demonstrates that people learn best and therefore grow best when their varied listening styles are addressed. This process took advantage of the varied learnings styles and spiritual types inside our congregation and, I would suppose, are within most, if not all, congregations. While the sermon alone is limited as to how many learning styles it can address, the *lectio divina* practice, group meetings, and implementation all provided a fuller way for listeners to hear, understand, and assimilate the lesson.
In the project I assumed, with Wesley, that Christians have a God-given ability to engage in activities that contribute to sanctification in their lives. Most of the practices engaged in by group members are what Wesley would have termed “works of mercy.” Such exercises Wesley believed would provide strengthening and shaping.

The feedback of group members indicates that this is what happened with them. Although participants were not asked about practicing the lesson learned on the questionnaire, when asked by the IE what part of the process had the greatest impact, the response they gave was “the specific challenge each week to put into practice what they had learned.”

An unexpected but added benefit was the way in which the process provided a dialogue that helped in the preparation of upcoming sermons. The feedback I received helped me understand the ways in which people were and were not resonating with what I was saying on Sunday mornings. This allowed me to adjust accordingly. However, it is not feasible to make this a goal going forward with the home groups at North Street because it would require that I attend all of the groups.

**Applicability**

A valid question pertaining to this project is its viability for other contexts. How applicable is this process to other churches? Is there anything specific to North Street that would make this project unusable in other church situations? In this section I will speak to these questions and seek to demonstrate that the process that I used is very applicable to other churches and can be a useful tool for other preachers.

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While this project took place within a Church of Christ, the applicability of the process is not limited to Churches of Christ. One reason that this is true is that not all of the group members had a Church of Christ background. While they are currently members of a Church of Christ, I believe that, if asked, they might actually identify themselves with the church in which they were raised. The diversity of the group demonstrates that a particular denomination is not needed for this process to be effective.

Another reason that the process is not limited to a Church of Christ is that there was nothing within the process that would identify it as a Church of Christ process. The process is specifically linked to Scripture so that all Protestants should find it accessible, but it has a component to it that has deep roots in both Catholic and Orthodox traditions (i.e. lectio divina). Any group that values the reading of Scripture, group learning, the preaching of God’s word, and the practice of that word will find this project accessible and valuable.

I believe that any church should be able to engage in this process. A particular church may utilize a traditional Sunday evening service and therefore will not implement the home group plan that North Street has adopted. But this is not a difficulty with the project because the focus group for the project did not meet on Sunday night, but on Monday night. Churches could consider using their Wednesday night Bible class time to practice this.

With the exception of small children, this process should be accessible to all ages. It may be that with pre-teens some adaptation or alternative explanation for lectio divina will have to be made so that they will understand what it is that they are to do. The
location is not an issue. While home groups happen in homes, the focus group met at the church building. However, I would suggest that small groups not meet in large rooms. It has a way of making the room feel cavernous, and it has the potential of diminishing the intimacy that the leader will be seeking to cultivate.

While any church should be able to practice this process, I find it difficult to imagine engaging in this process year around. It requires a lot of effort on the part of participants. Expecting such effort out of them all year long is expecting too much. I suspect that they will burn out and begin dropping out of the groups. I believe the sustainability of this can be quite long if churches do not seek to make this a year-round process. After having a break from the process, I can imagine group members being excited to step back into it.

Potential Improvements to the Process

While the process had great success and group members all experienced appreciation for it, there are nonetheless two areas in which improvements can be made to enhance the effectiveness of the process. The first is related to lectio divina, specifically with the definition of lectio. As noted above, the definition provided was difficult for the epistolary texts that we used. In the future I would provide either narrative texts for the groups or a different definition of lectio if we were using non-narrative texts.

The repeated refrain from participants was that the most difficult part of the lectio divina exercise was contemplatio. One person mentioned that she was taught not to add anything to the Bible, and in doing contemplatio she felt that she might be doing just that.
The fact that there was difficulty with contemplatio was not surprising to me. It is my experience that most in Churches of Christ tend to lean towards a kataphatic mind spiritual type and away from an apophatic mind type. Although we had some in the group that came from different church backgrounds, none of those backgrounds seemed to have an apophatic flavor to them. Thus those participants had difficulties with contemplatio as well.

I would not seek to eliminate the contemplatio component of lectio divina in the future. I believe that those of us who have less of an apophatic flavor to our church heritage are in greater need of this type of experience. Eliminating this experience also has a way of excluding those who are not of a particular spiritual type. The more this happens, the more we create homogeneous churches, which strikes me as being contrary to that which we find in the New Testament. What I would do is provide more training in practicing contemplatio so that participants who struggle with it could feel more comfortable in practicing it and those who are comfortable with it could feel they belong.

One area of difficulty that anyone attempting this process might encounter is participants’ reporting on their implementation. There was one participant in the group who, on more than one occasion, mentioned that he did not want to brag on himself. This participant felt that he should not report on the good that he might be doing in the world. Given Jesus’ comment about not doing acts of righteousness to be seen by others (Matt. 6:1), this is a legitimate concern. If participants are to openly talk about their experiences in practicing what they have learned, this difficulty will have to be considered and addressed.
Personal and Ministerial Significance

I have gained both personal and professional growth as a result of this project. Personally, I have developed a much deeper understanding of the theology of transformation and have been impacted by the experience with the focus group. Professionally, I have discovered a way to make my preaching more effective and transformational. This process reinforced for me the value of learning from others and the value of diversity within the church.

The project was especially meaningful to me personally because transformation has been a subject of personal interest for quite some time. I have heard statements by Christians in congregations in which I have served, as well as Christians in other congregations, that imply that they did not need to be involved in ministry or did not need to try to be more like Jesus because they already had met the criteria by which a person can be saved after they have died. Such comments placed me on a quest for the theological foundations of transformation and a better or different understanding of salvation.

In addition to the theological value, this process allowed me to see the theories of learning styles and spiritual types played out in the focus group. In the group discussions I could see how the participants related to the text for the week and the process as a whole because of the ways they learned or because of ways they approached spirituality. Thus the theories that were put forward in support of the project proved valid.

I learned all over again to appreciate the varying perspectives that people bring to the Bible. Much of this is related to age and upbringing, but life experiences play a
significant role in interpreting Scripture. The group ranged in ages from seventeen to mid-sixties. They included a high school student, a college student, a few professionals, and one person retired from a blue-collar profession, one African-American and seven Caucasians, four men and four women. Five members of the group were raised in Churches of Christ, while the other three were not. All of these varied perspectives made the meetings more valuable. To borrow from an old analogy about four blind men and an elephant, we might say that no one person in the group was feeling every part of the elephant. But when we all gathered together, each having a different experience with the elephant, we all were able to better understood the meaning of the word “elephant.”

Implementation

The next step in this process is to consider if the North Street Church should implement this process in future home group gatherings. If the church leadership and the home group leaders deem this a worthy process that contributes to the transformation of group members and growth for the whole church, I will suggest that some form of this process be adopted for home groups twice a year. Because I am currently overseeing the home groups, this is the plan that I have tentatively put in place. However, the plan cannot be implemented without agreement from the elders and the home group leaders.

This process makes the preaching event on Sunday mornings more meaningful and valuable for those who participate in the process. I believe that the process that the focus group experienced provides a good model for bringing about transformation in members of the North Street Church with the added benefit of providing overall strength
to the church. Church members who are more fully formed into the image of Christ make better disciples, leaders, and community servants.

My suggestion is that this process be implemented at North Street once in the fall and again in the spring. The reason for this was stated above regarding the effort that is needed to make this process beneficial. It takes a lot of work on the part of participants, and I do not believe that most people would be able or willing to do it year-round.

Allowing the home groups to study other subjects in between these two focal times allows those groups to have a break from the work that this process provides as well as provides opportunities for the groups to study topics that may be of specific interest to them.

It is my opinion that it is not necessary for the church to use lectio divina in the process. Another form of reading of the text that is to be preached may be utilized with similar results. However, lectio divina has the advantage of connecting with varying spiritual types. While another approach may be considered, being open and sensitive to these varying types is important if the church seeks to celebrate diversity in its midst.

If this process is to be implemented in the home groups at North Street, individuals in those groups will have to take the process more seriously. As stated above, my own experience as well as the reports from the home group leaders suggests that those who participated in this exercise in the fall of 2013 did not put as much effort into it as those in the focus group. It is widely known that you get out of it what you put into it. Thus for this process to be successful, I will need to prepare the group leaders more fully,
and the group leaders will need to stress to group members the importance of their participation in the process.

I also suggest that there should be some consideration given to mixing the groups for a period of time in the future. Currently, the groups are homogeneous in the sense that group members tend to be of approximate age and stages of life. If there is great value in learning in a diverse group, as the focal group stated, then it would be important for North Street to explore this option. If we are all touching the ear of the elephant, it will appear to us that the word “elephant” can be described as something that is shaped like a leaf.

**Fulfilling the Wesleyan Ideal**

While I did not attempt to imitate Wesley’s methodology or assimilate his theology completely, there was an attempt to allow the ideals of John Wesley to be a guide for the project. Specifically, I gave attention to Wesley’s emphasis on the priority of Scripture and time spent reading it daily, the importance of preaching, the value of group interaction, and the necessity of works of mercy. While the terminology that I used does not necessarily correspond to that of Wesley, the ideals are the same.

As with Wesley, I assumed that growth in holiness and transformation must begin with God. Wesley spoke of this as prevenient grace. While there was great emphasis on the freedom of group members to participate in their own transformation, it was understood that they could do so only because God provided them this ability. I share Wesley’s perspective that love is the dominant character trait of God and that it is this love that moved God to provide free will so that we could return his love.
I began this project with the intent of developing a process by which the sermon could be more transformational for listeners. In an attempt to do so, I searched throughout church history for someone who had been effective at doing this. While there are others who have engaged in this in various forms, I believe I could not have found a better model for my project than John Wesley. Wesley was an exemplary practitioner who provided inspiration, guidance, and mentoring in theologically informed pastoral practices that were especially apt for transformation in my context. Like me, Wesley was a preacher who was interested in having his sermons contribute to the image of Christ being formed in listeners. In addition, Wesley and I share some basic theological commitments that made him a good model for this project. For many reasons I am thankful for the life and work of John Wesley.

Conclusion

This thesis represents my efforts and the efforts of a focus group from the North Street Church to determine if a process could be established that would help the sermon be more effective for the transformation of the members of the church. While there are certainly adjustments that could and ought to be made to the process, all evidence indicates that the process was highly successful in reaching the goal intended. This has been a great experience for me and for those that participated. I pray that it will be fruitful for North Street and for others who choose to utilize it.


APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

The purpose of the study is to explore how the sermon experience on Sunday mornings may be enhanced for individuals by their engagement in daily devotional practices on the text of the sermon, and then by meeting with a group after the sermon has been preached to discuss the text. The group will then be asked to implement what they have learned some time during the following week. Those experiences will be discussed during the next group meeting.

You have been selected for this study and your responses and interaction will be treated as an important reference. The dates and times for the meetings are as follows (they are consecutive Monday nights in the calendar year of 2013).

- Sept. 30. 6:30-7:30 pm
- Oct. 7. 6:30-7:30 pm
- Oct. 14. 6:30-7:30 pm
- Oct. 21. 6:30-7:30 pm
- Oct. 28. 6:30-7:30 pm
- Nov. 4. 6:30-7:30 pm
- Nov. 11. 6:30-8:00 pm
- Nov. 18. 6:30-7:30 pm.

There are no foreseeable risks to you in this project. You can choose to participate as much or little in the discussions as you please and you may withdraw your participation at any time. All of your responses are confidential. No identifying information will be collected. While you will receive no compensation, your involvement in this exercise is important and your participation will benefit the North Street Church of Christ.

My wife, Lisa, will be in the group discussions on Monday nights taking notes. On the last evening of the group meetings (Nov. 18th), there will be an Independent Expert present to conduct an interview about your experience. Once again, you are free to participate as little or as much as you feel comfortable. Because the theology for my exercise is rooted in the work of John Wesley (the founder of Methodism), I have arranged for Dr. Bill Gandin of the United Methodist Church to serve as our Independent Expert. His questions will pertain only to your experience in the project.

If you have questions about this research, you can contact Curtis Barbarick at 530-356-0140 or 936-205-4911 or curtisbarbarick@gmail.com. You can also contact my thesis adviser, Dr. Jeff Childers, at the Graduate School of Theology at Abilene Christian University at 325-674-3730 or childersj@acu.edu. Thank you for your participation.
I have read and understand the information written above.

Participant’s signature ____________________________ Date

Signature of parent or guardian ____________________________ Date
Date

RE: Group project

Dear ________________

As we discussed, you are invited to participate in a project that will help in the completion of my Dmin program, but should also be of great benefit to the church. The purpose of the project is to explore how the sermon experience on Sunday mornings may be enhanced for individuals by their engagement in daily devotional practices on the text of the sermon, and then by meeting with a group after the sermon has been preached to discuss the text. The group will then be asked to implement what they have learned some time during the following week. Those experiences will be discussed during the next group meeting.

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- Nov. 18. 6:30-7:30 pm.

Curtis Barbarick
Preaching Minister
North Street Church of Christ
APPENDIX C

Schedule

- September 30th – Orientation – Begin *lectio divina* on Romans 5:1-11.
- October 6th – Sermon on Romans 5:1-11.
- October 7th – Group meeting. Begin *lectio divina* on Ephesians 2:1-10.
- October 21st – Group meeting. Begin *lectio divina* on 2 Peter 1:3-9.
- October 27th – Sermon on 2 Peter 1:3-9.
- October 28th – Group meeting. Begin *lectio divina* on Jude 1-10.
- November 3rd – Sermon on Jude 1-10.
- November 11th – Group meeting. No text given for *lectio divina*.
- November 18th – Interview with Independent Expert.
APPENDIX D

*Lectio Divina*

To practice *lectio divina*, you need to find a quiet place away from ALL phones and other distractions.

“Lectio: Read the passage carefully, getting the sequence and detail without thinking too much about the meaning. Imagine the time of day, season of the year, smells of the land, sounds of the countryside, the human touches – all the elements that would make this scene real to you. Transport yourself into the setting using your imagination.

Meditatio: Read the Scripture again. Why is there a record of this particular saying? What is the significance of this passage in the larger scheme of things? What does this piece mean? How does this affect an understanding of God? Of conduct? Do you see yourself in any of the characters in the passage?

Oratio: Allow your feelings to surface as you read the passage again. Do you feel happy, sad, angry or guilty? Silently or verbally talk this through with God; tell God what you feel about what you have read. Comment in your prayer on anything in the passage to which you respond.

Contemplatio: Sit quietly, breathe deeply and regularly, and let your mind go blank. As you quiet your inner self, simply listen in your heart. If you receive some impression or thought, quietly notice it; then focus your attention on remaining open. If you have no thoughts or impressions, return your mind to the Scripture passage. After a while, open your eyes, rested and refreshed, expressing gratitude for your experience.”

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1 Ware, 107.
APPENDIX E

Journaling

Journaling is an opportunity to reflect on your experiences. Very often we forget experiences we have had as well as how we felt at the time of those experiences. Journaling allows you to look back on your journey of faith to see what challenges you have faced as well as how you have made process in your journey. As you look back at your journal, you will likely notice key themes. You may also notice reoccurring sins or compulsions, but times of victory made be made apparent as well, as you remember feeling the presence of God in your challenges.

There are some important elements in journaling that help to make it successful. (1) Tell the truth. Because no one but you will see this, there is no sense lying to yourself or God. Be honest with your feelings. (2) Don’t feel like you have to be a great writer. Incomplete sentences or bullet statements are perfectly acceptable. As long as you can understand it later, it is valuable. (3) Don’t feel limited to your lectio divina time when writing in your journal. There may be events that take place during the day that you want to write down as they occur.

Some practical things you can do in journaling include (1) clipping pictures from newspapers and magazines that resonate with you and your experiences during this time, (2) recording your prayers; requests, answered prayers, times that you feel God is present or absent, or struggles in prayer, (3) writing whatever comes to your mind at the moment, and (4) writing down quotes that you read or hear, whether from a book or a person. It is your journal, write what helps you to reflect on your experience.\(^2\)

APPENDIX F

Weekly Group Meetings

Ice Breaker: These questions are designed to prime the pump of discussion. Below are some examples.

1. What is the craziest experience you have ever had?
2. When have you been really embarrassed?
3. If you could repeat one year of your life, which one would it be?

Discussion Questions

1. What was your experience like this week in trying to implement what you learned from our last passage? (Beginning week 2)
2. Tell us about your lectio divina experience.
   a. Was it a challenge?
   b. Did you find it difficult to find a time to do it?
   c. How much time did you take?
3. Please share with us, if you are willing, anything that you wrote in your journal.
4. How did what you learn resonate with what you heard in the sermon?
5. What does this Scripture tell you about God?
6. What does it tell you about humans?
7. How do you think that this text might form you?

Planned Implementation

1. What are some ways that we might put what we have learned so far into action?
2. Try to implement one of these ideas in the coming week and then be prepared to tell us about your experience next week.
APPENDIX G

Protocol for Note Taking

1. The NPO should…
   a. Take detailed and descriptive notes.
   b. Avoid being vague.
   c. Not make judgments in the notes.
   d. Not make generalizations in the notes.

2. The NPO should observe and notate…
   a. The seating arrangements of participants, using the chart below.
   b. Those who do and do not participate in the discussions.
   c. The content of the discussions.
   d. The manner in which each participant engages in discussion (e.g. aggressive, passive).
   e. Non-verbal behavior (e.g. checking the time, moving around in the chair).
   f. Casual conversation for five minutes before and after the meeting.
   g. Reoccurring themes.

3. Hand the data to me before leaving.
APPENDIX H

Seating Chart

1. Place the initials by the number of the chair the person sits in.
2. The red (1) chair represents me.

1. ____CB____  4. ________  7. ________
2. ________  5. ________  8. ________
3. ________  6. ________  9. ________
APPENDIX I

Coding Protocols

Manner of Recording

1. Type the notes into a Microsoft Word document that will be dated.
2. Record data in the structure listed below. Allow any new categories, to emerge in the structure.

Structure for Coding

1. Acts. What actions of individuals or the group were observed?
2. Words. What words were expressed?
3. Participation. How did individuals participate in the activities?
4. Relationships. How did individuals interact with one another?
5. Themes. What themes emerged from the discussion?
APPENDIX J

Questionnaire

Please take the next thirty minutes to evaluate your experience during this project by answering the four questions below. As with other parts of the project, your answers will be treated with confidentiality.

1. How has this experience changed how you hear the sermon on Sunday morning?

2. How has the practice of *lectio divina* contributed to your understanding of the text?

3. In what way did you find the group interaction to be helpful in your own transformation?

4. Describe the ways in which this exercise has helped you to be better transformed into the image of Christ.
APPENDIX K

Report of Independent Expert

Listening Session for
Group Feedback of
Curtis Barbarick Project
November 25, 2013

On November 21, 2013, I, Bill Gandin, Senior Pastor of Nacogdoches, First United Methodist Church, facilitated this listening session of the “pilot group” for Curtis Barbarick’s Doctor of Ministry project at Nacogdoches, North Street Church of Christ. Below are the questions and responses of this group, followed by a summary appraisal.

Q: **Tell me about your overall experience with this project.**
A: Very rewarding. Was coaxed to do more of the Bible reading we should’ve been doing.
   Discovered the value of differing interpretations of the Bible texts. Had been taught to “take it as it is.”
   The study process taught us to focus more deeply on the Bible text and the weekly sermon.
   The group was very supportive and challenging for the understanding of our faith.

Q: **Was there any part of the project that made a greater impact on you? If so, what was it and why?**
A: Perhaps the best part was the specific challenge each week to put into practice what we had learned, especially to live more like Christ. That included an awareness of the receiving of grace, and the opportunities given to share this grace with others.
   Many in the group preferred the “lectio divina” and “meditatio” exercises for reflecting more deeply on the Bible texts.

Q: **Tell me about the group interaction.**
A: Maybe the best sign of the effectiveness of the group process is that they “laughed a lot and shared a lot!”
   They definitely know much more about one another and tend to gravitate toward one another on Sunday mornings!
Felt very safe and comfortable to share with the group.

It was a unique experience to be in a group without their spouses and significant others. The size of the group (8 plus Curtis) was just right. No one felt any “stage fright” in sharing their thoughts. Also, the age, gender and ethnic diversity was especially rewarding!

Q: **Tell me how this changed how you listened to the sermon during the exercise.**
A: Helped with listening and not just hearing the sermon.
  When Curtis went deeper into the Scripture, this process made it easier to follow him.
  One commented that without this exercise, listening to the sermon was sometimes like “whac-a-mole.” This process let them know “where the mole would pop out.”
  Sometimes, the group thought they knew where Curtis would go with the text, and then he’s say something else that would make so much more sense than what was expected.
  Appreciates so much more the stories, analogies, and even the videos.

Q: **Tell me about your own Bible reading for the exercise.**
A: We often look at a familiar text very differently now.
  The different study exercises were a little hard to do at first, especially after being taught, growing up, to take the Bible as it is, and not to add or subtract to it.
  Probably had done “contemplatio” before, but focusing on doing it was hard.
  Imagining the Bible scene, especially with the five senses and with feelings, was tough for many of the group.
  Wasn’t particularly threatening to do this, but definitely challenged “just taking it at face value.”
  Favorite part was meditatio. Also, learning the background of the text, especially the Jewish customs.
  Accountability to the group and to Curtis helped overcome the problem of disciplining self to read and study the Bible regularly, since for many, this hadn’t been a daily discipline.

Q: **In what ways, if any, did this experience change you?**
A: “I now know how to study the Bible, and know that it will work.”
  “I am now much more aware of the grace we are given and more wanting to extend that grace.”
  “I appreciate and remember better the stories of others in the group.”
  “I believe I am more forgiving and more understanding.”
  “Forgiveness in daily living is now right at the top of my priorities.”

Q: **How do you think this exercise could be improved?**
A: Rather than staying with just one topic, it would have been better to change the topic every other week.

It would have been better if the group had more time to develop the Bible study habit before beginning the group meetings. It wasn’t until week three that the new process “sank in.”

The group suggested that they be given the sermon Bible text a week ahead.

The weekend might be better for parents of younger children.

**Summary Appraisal:**

It is my opinion that this project exceeded its intended goals of improving the listening to sermons for the purpose of transforming the listener. Through the trust that developed in the group, each member was encouraged and supported to start or improve his or her personal practice of Bible study, especially where it related to preparing to hear the sermon. All group members stated, in different ways, that they grew in their hunger for deeper Bible study, and experienced how satisfying this hunger helps them hear the sermon in a much fuller way.

All of this led to significant changes in the lives of the group members. All continue to be more aware daily of the grace God is giving them, and the grace God is calling them to share!

Possibly the best appraisal I can make of Curtis’ project and its success is my intention to introduce this process in the church I am serving. I am most grateful for the extensive work he has done to develop and test this process, and I am thankful for the privilege of experiencing first-hand the growth God has given each group member because of their living this process together!

Humbly submitted by:
Dr. Bill Gandin
Senior Pastor
First United Methodist Church
Nacogdoches, Texas
APPENDIX L

Spiritual Types

Head
(To Know God)

Extreme
Morality

Mystery
(The Hidden God)

Heart
(To Sense God)

Experiential

Interested in...
- Expression
- Tangible
- Purity ideals
Prayer leads to presence

Mystical

Interested in...
- Inner life
- Contemplation
- Radical denial
Prayer leads to unity with God

Rational

Interested in...
- Learning
- Thinking
- Doctrine
Prayer leads to insight

Revealed
(The Revealed God)

Extreme
Pietism

Extreme
Rationalism

Extreme
Quietism

Spiritual Types

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APPENDIX M

Summary of Field Notes

September 30, 2013

Participants Present:
Lori Cunyus
Robin Johnson
Joe Knobloch
Jared Matlock
John Stanaland
Danna Wallace
Shirley Woodson

Participants Absent:
Chandler McDonald. Chandler was raising chickens for an FFA project and an emergency came up with his chickens that he needed to handle immediately. I met with him personally on Thursday, October 3rd in my office briefed him on how the project was to take place and gave him the handout that contained the schedule, information regarding lectio divina and journaling. I also gave him his journal for the project. Because he did not receive the information in a timely manner, he was behind in practicing the exercise.

Seating Order (from my right):
Robin Johnson, Jared Matlock, Danna Wallace, Lori Cunyus, an empty chair, Shirley Woodson, Joe Knobloch, and John Stanaland. Ten chairs had been set in a circle with chair #10 being the chair for the NPO. This chair does not appear on the chart provided in Appendix H.

Location:
Room 10 off of the Family Life Center

Time:
6:30-7:30 pm.

Group Dynamic:
Most members arrived a little early or right on time. One person came in 9 minutes late. Group members entered in a variety of clothing ranging from business casual to shorts and flip-flops. Some greeted one another while others sat in silence and listened to the conversation. Although each had been informed about all that the project entailed, there
was still some angst in this first meeting over the project due to expectations that were not fully understood. The angst about an unknown exercise with some unknown people seemed apparent as different ones clicked pens, toyed with their hair and phones, and juggled their legs. No one lingered long after the meeting closed.

Description of the Meeting:
This meeting was an orientation about how the project would unfold. The materials were passed out and explained. The group practiced *lectio divina* together using Galatians 5:22-23 as the text so that each person would understand how to go about it on their own. Despite my intention, I failed to have everyone introduce themselves, knowing that there might be some unknown to one another. Fortunately, one of the group members asked about this. As a result introductions were made. Another person requested a table for the next meeting because she wanted to be able to take notes. Others nodded in agreement. One man brought his own journal to the meeting. Several asked questions so as to be clear of the expectations. Each one in the group seemed to be taking the project seriously. When the journals were passed out and journaling explained, one person said that he has been journaling since 1972.

I closed the meeting with the reading of the text for the week (Romans 5:1-11) followed by a prayer.

October 7, 2013

**Participants Present:**
Robin Johnson
Joe Knobloch
Jared Matlock
John Stanaland
Danna Wallace
Shirley Woodson

**Participants Absent:**
Lori Cunyus was out of town for a conference. Lori made me aware that she would miss this meeting before the project began. She was able to hear the first sermon and practice *lectio divina*, but was unable to interact with the group on this night.

**Seating Order (from my right):**
Jared Matlock, Robin Johnson, Danna Wallace, Shirley Woodson, an empty chair, Chandler McDonald, Joe Knobloch, and John Stanaland.

**Location:**
Room 10 off of the Family Life Center
Time:
6:30-7:30 pm.

Group Dynamic:
Most arrived early or on time. Two arrived late (at 6:38 and 6:40). The style of dress
reflected the same diversity as the first meeting. The group seemed a little more relaxed
after having experienced the first week of the project. There were a few conversations
before the meeting as well as after, but no one lingered very long.

Description of the Meeting:
After some causal conversation, I mentioned that a woman within the congregation had
passed away within the last hour. She and her husband were known by most of the group.
After some discussion about her passing, I opened the meeting with a prayer for the
husband and family members of the woman who had passed as well as a blessing upon
the project and the meeting. I then asked everyone to introduce themselves again.

I proceeded with a reading of the week’s text (Romans 5:1-11). Most had their Bibles
opened and followed along. The two ladies that came in late did so after this. I then asked
the group about their experience with *lectio divina*. Several made comments regarding
grace and their own experience with the subject. They seemed to gain from the exercise,
but two people specifically mentioned that *contemplatio* was difficult for them. One
reflected on being taught to not add anything to the Bible.

I next asked about their experience with journaling. Three people expressed that they
were very comfortable journaling. One mentioned that writing in the journal helped him
to slow down and think. One person seems to have brought two journals with him (not
the same person who expressed in the orientation that he had been journaling for years).

The discussion then turned to how the exercise helped each one to resonate with the
sermon. One person said that she missed worship on Sunday, but was able to listen to the
sermon online. One man said that he missed the sermon but his wife had taken notes for
him. He would look for the link to listen. There were several points made in the sermon
that resonated with group members.

I then asked what this text is calling us to do, be, or think. Several ideas were offered. I
then asked how we might implement what we learned. Several options were offered.

I asked the group to turn to Ephesian 2:1-10. I read this text in preparation for the *lectio
divina* of the coming week. I concluded the meeting by closing with a prayer.

October 14, 2013

Participants Present:
Lori Cunyus
Participants Absent:
Robin Johnson was out of town for a conference. Robin informed me in the first week that she was going to be out of town for the conference. I told her and the whole group that I did not think it a fair expectation that all of them would make every meeting, but that they make each one that they could. She continued her *lectio divina* and journaling while out of town. She did not miss a Sunday due to the conference.

Seating Order (from my right):
Danna Wallace, Jared Matlock, Shirley Woodson, Chandler McDonald, an empty chair, Joe Knobloch, Lori Cunyus, and John Stanaland.

Location:
Room 10 off of the Family Life Center

Time:
6:30-7:30 pm.

Group Dynamic:
Most arrived just before the meeting began, although two came in significantly late; one at 6:40 and the other at 6:47. The latter had been significantly late to each meeting thus far. There was some causal conversation, but because they had not arrived very early, not much was said before I opened the meeting with a prayer. Four stayed around afterwards and talked with one another.

Description of the Meeting:
After prayer I opened our session by asking how the practice of the previous text had gone. All but one of those present at the time shared some experience they had with putting the text into action. One of them felt a little uncomfortable about sharing his experience, claiming that he was not a hero.

I then read the text that the group had been working through and that I preached the previous day (Ephesians 2:1-10). I followed this by asking how their *lectio divina* experience was coming along. Most admitted that they did not do it every day, but did it often. All but one shared something about their experience with the text.

I followed this discussion with a question about journaling. Three shared that they have journaled before. One shared again that he has been journaling since 1972. The three
spoke of the value of journaling, but no one offered anything from their journal.

The discussion turned to how each one was able to interact with the sermon. One said that he understood the sermon better. Themes from the sermon were brought up by different ones and then discussed by the group. Five members of the group shared ways that this text might form them and offered ideas about to implement the text.

I closed by reading the text for the coming week (Titus 2:11-14) followed by a prayer.

October 21, 2013

Participants Present:
Lori Cunyus
Robin Johnson
Joe Knobloch
Jared Matlock
Chandler McDonald
John Stanaland
Shirley Woodson

Participants Absent:
Danna Wallace called to say that she was ill and would not be able to attend the meeting.

Seating Order (from my right):
Lori Cunyus, John Stanaland, an empty chair, Robin Johnson, Joe Knobloch, Shirley Woodson, Chandler McDonald, and Jared Matlock.

Location:
Room 10 off of the Family Life Center

Time:
6:30-7:30 pm.

Group Dynamic:
Most came in just before 6:30, though one arrived at 6:41 (the same one who had been this late the other nights). I started the meeting a little late so there was more conversation between group members. Several shared things with the group while a few spoke to one another. The style of dress had not altered from the first night. Four members of the group stayed around afterwards and spoke with one another.

Description of the Meeting:
I opened the meeting with a prayer and then asked about how implementation of the text had gone. Three shared their experience. This was followed by a reading of Titus 2:11-
14. Several spoke of things that stood out to them in their lectio divina exercise. One asked me a question which I answered. A discussion about grace followed. The text prompted another question; “What about those who have never heard?” A discussion about other religions followed this. Two people wrote in their journals during this time.

I then asked how their lectio divina exercise resonated with the sermon. One mentioned that he was not at worship and did not hear the sermon. Several commented about the analogy of the potter and the clay that was used in the sermon. Another said that that evening, at an area wide singing, a song was sung that he had never heard before but that made him think of the lesson. One person marked in his Bible. Another question was raised; “If grace has been extended to all men, why is the path narrow?”

Three people offered ways that the text could be implemented in the coming week. Two wrote in their journals, presumably about these suggestions.

I closed by reading the coming week’s text, 2 Peter 1:3-9, followed by a prayer.

October 28, 2013

Participants Present:
Lori Cunyus
Robin Johnson
Joe Knobloch
Jared Matlock
Chandler McDonald
John Stanaland
Danna Wallace
Shirley Woodson

Participants Absent:
None.

Seating Order (from my right):
Lori Cunyus, Danna Wallace, Shirley Woodson, Robin Johnson, Joe Knobloch, Chandler McDonald, Jared Matlock, John Stanaland.

Location:
Room 10 off of the Family Life Center

Time:
6:30-7:30 pm.

Group Dynamic:
One person arrived fifteen minutes early. The one who had been significantly late the
previous nights was only six minutes late on this night. All others arrived shortly before 6:30. Five members of the group engaged in casual conversation with one another as well as with me. One of the group members brought in left-over candy from Halloween. Three of them took some candy and the meeting began. Two men and two women spoke to each other afterwards.

**Description of the Meeting:**
I opened the meeting with a prayer and then asked about implementation of the previous week’s text. One expressed that he tried to extend grace to others but found it difficult to give to some people. He said that he had not really learned anything from the exercise. Four expressed a positive experience with extending grace. One shared how grace had been extended to him. The one who had previously expressed that he did not want to be thought a hero once again felt uncomfortable sharing his experience. He said that it was not in his nature to tell us of positive things that he was doing.

I then read the text that they had been reading through during the previous week, 2 Peter 1:3-9 and asked about their lectio divina exercise with this text. All but one shared something. This conversation turned to thoughts about the sermon. Several themes from the sermon were discussed and one person said that this exercise has given her a renewed interest in listening to the sermon.

Several shared the value of journaling, but no one offered anything from their journals.

Several ideas about how this text might form us or how we might practice this text were offered. While these suggestions were being made, two people wrote in their journals and one in his Bible.

I closed the meeting by reading the text for the coming week, Jude 1-10, followed by a prayer.

November 4, 2013

**Participants Present:**
Lori Cunyus
Robin Johnson
Joe Knobloch
Jared Matlock
John Stanaland
Danna Wallace

**Participants Absent:**
Chandler McDonald and Shirley Woodson did not come. This was not expected.
Seating Order (from my right):
Lori Cunyus, Danna Wallace, an empty chair, Robin Johnson, Joe Knobloch, an empty chair, Jared Matlock, John Stanaland.

Location:
Room 10 off of the Family Life Center

Time:
6:30-7:30 pm.

Group Dynamic:
There was good group interaction about moving, children, and the church’s website. The camaraderie in the group appears to be growing. One person did not involve herself very much, but she was sick. She said that she didn’t feel like coming, but came anyway. The group seems to have settled into a regular seating pattern. All were on time or a little early.

Description of the Meeting:
After opening the meeting with a prayer I asked the group about the implementations they planned from the previous week. Three offered ways that they practiced the text. Two others offered other events that brought the meaning of the text to mind.

I then read the text for the week (Jude 1-10). Two said that they were a little distracted from the point of the text as they wanted to know more about Jude’s citations and references to things not in the Bible. One expressed anger about the false teachers, reflecting on her own experience of some friends who had left the faith for what she considers to be a cult. More discussion followed about aspects of the text that stood out to each. Some wrote things down or underlined in their Bibles during this discussion.

The discussion then turned to the way in which the lectio divina exercise allowed each one to interact with the sermon. One person referenced an analogy made in the sermon. Another spoke of college kids cheapening God’s grace. A discussion ensued about whether the false teachers even know that they are false. A third said that reflected that she and her husband were impacted by the sermon differently. She thought that it impacted her more deeply due to her preparation.

I then asked the group about their journaling experience. Only two mentioned anything about their experience this week. One said that journaling really opens up the flood gates and helps her to pay more attention. Another said that she likes to journal because she likes to look back at it later. No one shared anything from their journal.

I closed the group by reading the text for the coming week (Matthew 18:21-35) followed by a prayer. Two wrote in their journals something about the reading. One underlined in her Bible.
November 11, 2013

Participants Present:
Lori Cunyus
Robin Johnson
Joe Knobloch
Jared Matlock
Chandler McDonald
John Stanaland
Danna Wallace
Shirley Woodson

Participants Absent:
None.

Seating Order (from my right):
Lori Cunyus, Shirley Woodson, Danna Wallace, Robin Johnson, Joe Knobloch, Jared Matlock, Chandler McDonald, John Stanaland.

Location:
Room 10 off of the Family Life Center

Time:
6:30-7:30 pm.

Group Dynamic:
One person was 15 minutes early and another was 11 minutes late (the same one that has been significantly late each time). All the rest were on time. There was some causal conversation about football and television. On this night there was a significant breakthrough in the group. One person shared an event that made forgiveness very difficult. This opened the door for another to share a personal experience regarding the challenge of forgiveness and a third followed with a story. I was impressed that they were willing to share such personal things when they had only been together for such a short time. I reminded everyone to keep what had been said in confidence.

At the end of the session I passed out the questionnaire, explained it, and asked if anyone had any questions. I then left the room and asked each to bring the questionnaire to me when they were finished. I told them that I did not want them to put their name on the questionnaire. Everyone in the group took most of the allotted thirty minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

Description of the Meeting:
I opened the meeting with a prayer and an introduction of the NPO who was filling in for Lisa (Becky VanShoubrouek took Lisa’s place for this one evening because Lisa had to
go to a conference). I also reminded everyone that this was the session in which they would need to stay after an additional thirty minutes to fill out the questionnaire.

I asked how the practice of the text went last week. Two people spoke of being intentional about sitting with someone else in a context where that person seemed to be excluded or was an outsider. They did this because this was discussed as a way of extending grace to others the week before. The conversation then turned to three guys in the church who fit the category of “Outcast” and how they are treated.

I then read the text from last week (Matthew 18:21-35). Everyone in the group followed along in their Bibles. Members of the group then responded to the question about their *lectio divina* experience with this text. It was during this discussion that the three people shared their difficult experience with forgiveness. Everyone contributed to the discussion. One person wrote in his journal. One person referenced a phrase that had come from a previous sermon. One person shared a passage from her journal about grace. This prompted another to do so as well.

Because this was the final meeting, there was no planned implementation discussed for the coming week. I closed the meeting with a prayer.
APPENDIX N

Group Conversations

I analyzed all of the field notes to see who had personal conversations with whom before or after the meetings. Below are the results. The participants are listed in the order in which I first found them mentioned in the field notes. Some of these conversations may have happened more than once, but they happened at least once with the individual listed.

Participant 1
- Participant 4
- Participant 3
- Participant 6
- Participant 2
- Participant 5

Participant 2
- Participant 7
- Participant 1
- Participant 4

Participant 3
- Participant 4
- Participant 1
- Participant 5

Participant 4
- Participant 7
- Participant 2
- Participant 3
- Participant 1

Participant 5
- Participant 3
- Participant 1

Participant 6
- Participant 7
- Participant 8
- Participant 1

Participant 7
- Participant 6
- Participant 4
- Participant 2

Participant 8
- Participant 6
APPENDIX O

Meaningful Comments Made During the Group Meetings

In looking back through the field notes I logged which person had something meaningful to say during conversations about the four topics that were regularly discussed (*lectio divina*, Journaling, Interacting with the Sermon, and Practicing). A person may have said something on a topic more than once, but they at least had something meaningful to say once. By “Meaningful” I mean that they were contributing to the discussion, not making a joke or simply affirming someone else’s comment. The most any participant could have spoken on a subject is four times. The numbering of the participants follows the pattern established in Appendix N. Because session 1 was an orientation session, it is not considered for this analysis.

**Session 2**
Experience with *lectio divina* (Participants 4, 1, 7, 3, 5, 2, 6).
Journaling (Participant 2).
Sermon (Participants 7, 2, 3, 4, 1, 6, 5).
Practicing (No possibilities for practice had been available at this point in the exercise).

**Session 3**
Experience with *lectio divina* (Participants 3, 1, 5, 8, 4, 6).
Journaling (Participants 5, 4, 8).
Sermon (Participants 5, 1, 4, 8).
Practicing (Participants 6, 4, 8, 3, 2).

**Session 4**
Experience with *lectio divina* (Participants 1, 2, 3, 7).
Journaling (Participant 7).
Sermon (Participants 8, 3, 7, 5, 2, 4).
Practicing (Participants 2, 8, 4, 1).

**Session 5**
Experience with *lectio divina* (Participants 1, 7, 6, 2, 5, 8, 6).
Journaling (Participants 1, 7, 8).
Sermon (Participants 1, 2, 8).
Practicing (Participants 1, 7, 6, 4, 8, 5).

**Session 6**
Experience with *lectio divina* (Participants 2, 3, 5, 8, 4, 6).
Journaling (Participants 8, 6).
Sermon (Participants 8, 4).
Practicing (Robin, John, Joe, Lori).

**Session 7**
Experience with *lectio divina* (Participants 8, 1, 7, 4, 5).
Journaling (Participants 8, 4).
Sermon (Participants 4, 1).
Practicing (Participants 1, 6, 4, 5).

Average for Participants

Participant 1 – 2.2
Participant 2 – 1.66
Participant 3 – 1.16.
Participant 4 – 2.5
Participant 5 – 1.66
Participant 6 – 1.8
Participant 7 – 2.2
Participant 8 – 2.66

Amount of Comments by Category

Experience with *lectio divina* – 30.
Journaling – 12.
Sermon – 24.
Practicing – 23 (After considering that session 2 lacked a practicing component, the average is 27.6).
APPENDIX P
Excerpt of Group Discussion

Below is an excerpt from session five. It is an example of the group interaction and how group members learn from one another. The text under discussion is 2 Peter 1:3-9.

*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.*

*For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.*

Me – Tell me about your *lectio divina* experience this week.
Participant 11 – Love covers all the others on the list.
Participant 2 – I first read it in the New Living Translation. It uses the phrase “mutual Affection.” Doesn’t that mean “brotherly love”? Faith began first, but love ends.
Participant 3 – They all build on each other.
Participant 4 – How would they increase in measure?
Participant 2 – I like the idea of increasing in measure.
Participant 5 – This ties back to never fully understanding God. Always growing in faith.
Participant 2 – V. 3 says that God has given us everything. I tried to come up with a list from the Bible; Jesus, the Holy Spirit, guidelines, examples.
Participant 4 – He has given us a way of escape.
Me – Is grace in this Scripture?
Participant 2 – The promise is a gift of grace.
Participant 1 – “Through this he has given us”…Promise. It says this twice.
Participant 4 – All the things that are given build upon God’s grace.

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1 The listing of the participants in this section does not correspond to those in other appendices.
APPENDIX Q

Sermon References in Group Meetings
I analyzed the field notes to see where group members made specific references to analogies or citations from the sermon without prompting. There were direct questions I asked regarding the sermon or something from within the sermon to which participants responded. These are not listed below. Some of the references or comments, while not prompted by me, could have been made as a result of being prompted by another group member.

I wanted to see if certain themes, analogies or statements in the sermon resonated with them. Below are the results. The numbering of the participants follows the pattern established in Appendix N. Because the group had yet to hear a sermon when they met in session 1, that meeting is not referenced here.

Session 2
- Participant 7 referenced the analogy of treason.
- Participant 4 also referenced this analogy and reflected on the question, “How much treason can we get away with”?

Session 3
- Participant 5 said that they had never thought about grace as a mother teaching her child the right way to live.
- Participant 4 made reference to my comment that “God doesn’t just take the Israelites out of Egypt, but makes them into something beautiful.”
- Participant 4 also made reference to my analogy about being at the bottom of the pit.
- Participant 8 also made a reference to the picture of being at the bottom of the pit.

Session 4
- Participant 7 asked if we are still perfecting, referring to my comments about growing in grace.
- Participant 8 expressed a gladness to still be on the potter’s wheel, referencing my analogy of God’s grace shaping us the way that a potter shapes clay into something beautiful.
- Participant 3 said, “I didn’t think of our molding being a continuous process.”
- Participant 5 made referenced someone jumping off of the potter’s table.
- Participant 2 liked the comment that the clay better be ready because it hurts. It’s not always a gentle process. Sometimes it needs to hurt.

Session 5
- Participant 8 referenced the lumps of clay from previous sermon.
- Participant 1 resonated with the analogy of the row boat.
- Participant 2 also resonated with the analogy of the row boat.

Session 6
- Participant 8 appreciated the house analogy.
- Participant 4 also appreciated the house analogy.

Session 7
- No comments were made. This may have been due to the great amount of time that was spent during that session of the three who shared stories of struggling with forgiveness. These discussions left little time to talk about the sermon.
BRIEF VITA

Curtis Barbarick was born and raised in Porterville, California. After graduating from High School he attended Lubbock Christian University where he received a bachelor of arts in Bible. He completed his master of science in ministry at Pepperdine University in 1993 and completed work on a Masters of Divinity equivalency program at Abilene Christian University in 2010. Curtis met and married his wife, Lisa Barbarick, at Lubbock Christian University. They have been married for thirty-two years and have two children. Curtis served churches in California for over twenty years before relocating to Nacogdoches, Texas in 2012 to serve the North Street Church of Christ.