

# Radical Grace: Wesleyan Beliefs for Today Companion Journal

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## Introduction

Journaling was a key feature of John Wesley's spirituality. As we explore the roots of our Wesleyan beliefs I invite you to keep a journal and reflect on scripture, quotes, hymns, and questions. Think of your journaling as a three-way conversation between you, God, and our spiritual ancestors, John and Charles Wesley. As with any conversation, there will be questions and arguments as well as affirmation and agreement. All of it helps our faith deepen and expand.

This is a companion to my sermon series, "Radical Grace: Wesleyan Beliefs for Today" (September 8-29). Each Sunday will focus on a different aspect of what it means to live a grace-filled life.

I have been keeping a journal since I was sixteen, when I first embraced the faith as my own. For several years I used a simple composition book and then got fancy and started buying moleskins. I made journal entries periodically, but for the past ten years I have been journaling on my laptop which I update every Friday morning. However you do it, I am certain that the spiritual practice of journaling is beneficial.

The sermon series is a part of a larger initiative at North. Soon after the 2019 General Conference adopted more stringent discriminatory practices against LGBTQ persons and allied pastors, North's board of directors engaged in extended conversations about our identity and role in the denomination. Board members affirmed that we are Methodist but expressed a desire to understand what that means in light of North's diversity and inclusivity.

To that end, the board authorized me to assemble a team for theological reflection whose purpose is to draft a theological statement that expresses Wesleyan beliefs through the lens of North's vision of ministry. In November, the entire congregation will be invited to reflect on and give input to the draft. The goal is to finalize it by Advent and share it throughout the denomination. The purpose of the sermon series is to help you begin that reflection process.

Wesleyan theology is always more than an academic exercise. Hymnody is at the heart of how Methodists do theology and worship shapes how we understand our faith. To that end, there will be special music and worship, such as a "Love Feast," that express our tradition (September 29, 5 p.m., chapel).

All of this is being done in preparation for an uncertain future. General Conference will meet in May 2020 and will wrestle with the future of our denomination. One likely outcome will be a separation of the denomination into various branches. North will remain true to its values and in so doing will be seeking to align with others who share our affirmation of inclusion. All the more reason, we must reflect on our identity as Methodists.

I hope you will join me in this season of reflection.

Pastor Darren

Fall 2019

## Week One: The Grace-Full Life

**Sunday's Lessons:** Acts 17:26-31 and Genesis 1:26-28

### **John & Charles Wesley Quotes:**

“But love is the very image of God: it is the brightness of God’s glory. By love we are not only made like God, but in some sense one with God....Love is perfect freedom.”

“Now this great work, this one thing needful, is the renewal of our fallen nature. In the image of God we were made, but sin has now effaced the image of God.”

“[Rebelling slaves are] asserting their native liberty, which they have as much right to as to the air they breathe.”

### **Question for Self-Reflection:**

Describe yourself in 1-2 sentences. Have you ever thought of yourself as a reflection of God’s image? Does that make you rethink your impression of yourself?

If sin is anything that humans do that distorts or destroys the image of God, then when have you

- Sinned by ignoring or hurting the image of God in another person or yourself?
- Been sinned against by someone or something that ignored or hurt God’s image in you?

This week, look for signs of God’s universal (prevenient) grace in

- The beauty of creation and humanity
- Our desire to find God
- Works of justice and mercy that push back against evil and injustice

Make a list of these things. At the end of the week use this as a prayer of thanksgiving.

## Week Two: Radical Acceptance

**Sunday's Lessons:** Romans 5:6-11 and Exodus 3:7-12

### **John & Charles Wesley Quotes:**

“Justification is another word for pardon. It is the forgiveness of all our sins, and (what is necessarily implied) our acceptance with God.”

“And can it be that I should gain  
an interest in the Savior's blood!  
Died he for me? who caused his pain!  
For me? who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?”

### **Reflection Questions:**

When you do something wrong, what do you do? When someone has done you wrong, how do you respond?

Repentance means “to turn.” What do you need to turn away from in order to accept God’s forgiveness and guidance?

Make a list of those parts of your life you struggle to accept about yourself. Then, imagine Jesus wrapping his arms around you, including all those parts you find hard to accept.

## Week Three: Radical Transformation

**Sunday's Lessons:** 1 John 4:7-18 and 1 Peter 1:13-16

### **John & Charles Wesley Quotes:**

"In a Christian believer, love sits upon the throne which is erected in the inmost soul; namely, love of God and humanity, which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival."

"Where there is no love of God there is no holiness."

"The life of God in the soul of a believer is the continual inspiration of God's Holy Spirit; God's breathing into the soul, and the soul's breathing back what it first receives from God; a continual action of God upon the soul, and a re-action of the soul upon God; an unceasing presence of God, the loving, pardoning God, manifested to the heart, and perceived by faith; and an unceasing return of love, praise, and prayer, offering up all the thoughts of our hearts, all the words of our tongues, all the works of our hands, all our body, soul, and spirit, to be a holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus."

"Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven, to earth come down;  
fix in us they humble dwelling; all they faithful mercies crown!"

### **Reflection Questions:**

What is your life's goal? What motivates you? What, if any, role does God's love play?

When have you been a channel of God's love to others? How can you be a more effective channel of God's love?

List any spiritual habits you currently practice. In the next 30 days, try a new spiritual practice to help you become more receptive to God's love.

## Week Four: The Grace-Full Church

**Sunday's Lessons:** Ephesians 2:19-22 and Galatians 3:25-29

**John & Charles Wesley Quotes:**

"[The purpose of the church is] that Christ's followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works."

"Though we can't think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences."

"Blest be the dear uniting love  
that will not let us part;  
our bodies may far off remove,  
we still are one in heart.  
Joined in one spirit to our Head,  
where he appoints we go,  
and still in Jesus' footsteps tread,  
and do his work below."

**Reflection Questions:**

When have you experienced love in the church? Unity in the church?

The next Sunday morning, look around at the congregation and imagine the Holy Spirit being present. In what ways do you see/hear/feel the Spirit moving?

Make a list of persons in your life who may need to experience God's grace at North who currently do not attend. Pray for them and invite them to church.