

DAILY DEVOTIONS FOR MAY 27 - JUNE 2

Message Series: “Turning 21 with Wesley: 21 Questions for becoming Mature Christians”

Book: *The Wesley Challenge: 21 Days to a More Authentic Faith*, by Chris Folmsbee, Abingdon Press in March 2017.

Background: In 1729 John Wesley, the leader of a small group at Oxford University called “Methodists,” posed 21 questions to help the group pursue a more mature Christian faith.

FAMILY ACTIVITY:

Create a “Thanksgiving Jar.” Decorate some type of small, simple container such as a basket, jar or bucket. Place a stack of index cards or strips of paper next to the container along with pens, colored pencils or crayons. Every day for the next three weeks, invite each family member to grow in faith by writing or drawing a picture of something they can thank God for specific to that day. You can do this together at the same time or individually throughout the day. If you wish, your family can share these aloud each night at the dinner table. Then, put this jar with your Thanksgiving decoration, so you can save them read them again on Thanksgiving.

DAILY DEVOTIONS:

Sunday, May 27

Scripture: John 3:3-17

Wesley’s question, “Is Jesus real to me?” may be the most important of all the 21 questions. It gets at the point of our Christian pursuit of holiness and witness. Wesley wanted Christians to make sure that we are not simply following a religion, but experiencing a relationship with Jesus. When Jesus is real to us, that reality shows itself to us and others through its impact on our words, actions, disciplines and practices.

- Discipleship, the spiritual growth process of becoming a deeply committed Christian, is about experiencing the person of Jesus. When has Jesus seemed the most real to you in your life? The least real? What were those circumstances?
- Jesus becomes more real to us through daily practices of discipleship. Bible reading, study, prayer, mission work, fasting, time of solitude, submission to God’s will for our life and joining authentic community all change the lens through which we view the world. What discipleship practices can you put into your life to become a more deeply committed Christian?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, please give me a strong nudge to move me in the direction of making my commitment to you more real. Amen.

Monday, May 28

Scripture: Luke 11:1-4

Wesley’s Question: Am I enjoying prayer?

Prayer becomes a joy when we find a deeper understanding of God, self, others, and the world through it. Prayer is to help us, not inform God. We pray to lean into God’s goodness and strength. Prayer becomes a joy with time and practice.

- How were you taught to pray? Think about a time when you prayed in earnest. What were the circumstances surrounding that time of prayer? What did you feel when the prayer was completed?
- Commit to establishing a prayer routine. Pick a quiet place in your home or office. Pray at the same time each day. Start simply, dedicating just a few minutes at first. Pray in a way that works for you. If you enjoy writing, you may want to write out your prayers. You may want to pray out loud. You can pray as you walk or exercise. Consider downloading a prayer app or sign up for a daily devotional email. Find the ways that lead you to richer experiences.

Prayer: Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4:1)

Tuesday, May 29

Scripture: Philippians 4:8-9

Wesley's Question: Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?

The feelings we get when we insist on doing something we shouldn't—gossiping, lusting, lying, stealing, cheating, etc.—usually signal an inner battle of our selfish will to push God away and be in charge of our own lives. A rightly trained uneasy conscience is a good thing. It reminds us that we are called to live into the goodness in which God created us.

- Do you have areas of your life that are causing you an uneasy conscience? What are these weaknesses? Dig deeply—what is driving these temptations in your life? What steps can you put into place to combat the temptations you are facing?
- Every time you find yourself weakening to a temptation, ask yourself: “What are the consequences of giving in to this weakness? Who may be hurt by this? Will the satisfaction of this moment be worth the consequences I may face?” Force yourself to answer the questions before you act.

Prayer: God, you alone know the true condition of my heart. I may be able to trick others with my words and actions, but you know the truth and are not fooled. Lead me to do and say only what is pleasing in your sight. Amen.

Wednesday, May 30

Note: Pray the prayer below before you read the Scripture passage.

Scripture: John 15:1-8

Wesley's Question: Did the Bible live in me today?

The Bible is a love story—the story of a loving, creative God who is good. It is a collection of wonderfully engaging stories, written in a variety of genres such as poetry, prophecy and parables, meant not just to amuse or entertain, but to shape our very life. Engaging the Bible is about intimacy more than literacy. Reading the Bible for knowledge of God is one thing. Allowing the Bible to read you for transformation is altogether different.

- Wesley didn't ask, “Did I read my Bible today?” but “Did it live in me?” Is the Bible actively shaping your heart, your inner self? To allow the Bible to live in us we must be humble people, taking a posture of listening, learning, action and service. How do you let the Bible live in you each day?
- The Bible is both divine and human. The Bible reveals the human struggle, discloses all that is wrong with humanity—violence, lust, murder, injustice, worldliness—and at the same time discloses God's enduring love that overcomes human deficiencies and gives new life. Has your view of the Bible changed throughout your life? Do you value the Bible differently, or relate to it differently, than you did when you were younger? How? What has caused this change?

Prayer: God, prepare my ears to hear your voice in the Bible. Open my heart and mind to the truths held in its pages. Holy Spirit, guide me into all truth and expand my understanding of the person and work of Jesus in a real and living way. Amen.

Thursday, May 31

Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:32-33 and Acts 5:27-32

Wesley's Question: Did I disobey God in anything?

John told us in 1 John that to love Jesus means keeping His commandments. When we choose to obey God, we honor God's love for us and live as God desired. When we disobey God by choosing to live our own ways, we may think we have freedom, but we become slaves to sin. How do we move beyond a love for self and toward a love for obeying God? When we don't do what God intends we must choose to confess our actions (or lack of actions) and ask for forgiveness. Confession taps into God's forgiveness, and forgiveness gives us a fresh start. God's love is always greater than your biggest blunder.

- In what areas of my life am I choosing my own desires over God's desires? Where can I find help in overcoming my shortcomings? In what ways do you think Jesus models for us the way God intended for humans to live?

- How can I worship God with the freedom God has granted me, rather than going my own way in rebellion against God? Here's one idea: memorize the verse, "To you, Lord, belong greatness and power, honor, splendor, and majesty, because everything in heaven and on earth belongs to you. Yours, Lord, is the kingship, and you are honored as head of all" (1 Chronicles 29:11). When you sense a struggle within you to obey God's authority, repeat it to yourself.

Prayer: God, you gladly and graciously forgive all who repent and turn toward you. Thanks for your promise of enduring and redeeming grace! Help me to be like Jesus, so that I might show my love for you to the world around me. Amen.

Friday, June 1

Scripture: Luke 12:13-15

Wesley's Question: Do I pray about the money I spend?

- Wesley famously said, "Gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can." That was why he included the question, "Do I pray about the money I spend?" This means we go to God realizing that we do not possess any money of our own. Rather, we are simply holding God's money for the purposes of God's work in the world, and we seek His guidance in how we spend not just 10%, but ALL of it!
- What inner reactions did you have to Wesley's statement, "Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can"? Which dimensions of Wesley's guideline most surprise or challenge you? How does this approach to handling money match up with advice you get from financial publications, web sites or advisers? In what ways does it differ?
 - Evaluate your recent spending. How closely do your habits align with Wesley's advice? Make a three column chart: Gain, Save, Give. In each column, estimate the amounts you have gained, saved, and given since the beginning of the year. How do you believe your spending habits—as they might be reflected in the chart for the rest of the year—might change if you prayed daily about the money you spent?

Prayer: God, I want to be a sensible steward of all you have provided. Protect me from an attitude marked by greed. May I grow toward faithful generosity, spending whatever money you entrust to me in a way that brings glory to you. Amen.

Saturday, June 2

Scripture: Hebrews 4:11-13

Wesley's Question: Do I give time for the Bible to speak to me every day?

Wesley was seeking a more fruitful experience when reading the Bible. He wanted daily Bible reading to be a way for God to speak to us and shape us into more deeply committed Christians. Bible reading is not a task to be completed. It is a habitual practice to shape us and mold us into whom God wants us to be. Learning to listen to God through the Bible forms a life foundation that helps us become more aware of other ways, such as music, prayer, or the beauty of creation, in which God also desires to speak to us.

- Do you struggle with finding (or taking) the time to read the Bible each day? As with any other good habit, start small—even five minutes a day, and let the time increase as the discipline strengthens your spiritual life. Is your challenge more with understanding and interpreting what you read? Guides like this can help aid your understanding—but you still need to reflect and pray, taking in what you understand from each Bible passage. You can find more help in understanding by being in a small group or Bible study. Join—or create one—at work, at your gym, or with neighbors or friends. If you know someone who has developed the discipline of daily Bible reading, ask them about their experiences and routine, and what helps them hear God speaking through the Bible.

Prayer: God, stir in me a passion to read the Bible daily, and meditate on what I read. Give me the ability to understand, so that I can put your teachings into practice. Help the words of the Bible to not be just words on a page, but passageways of mercy into my heart. Amen.