

April 2000

COVENANT DISCIPLESHIP QUARTERLY

To witness to Jesus Christ in the world and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

MERCY • PIETY

Compassion & Justice

Edie Harris



Perhaps the most difficult component of accountable discipleship is doing acts of justice. Devotion and worship seem “normal” for most churchgoers, and compassion comes easily to the caring folks of a faith community. But justice requires time, effort, and determination—and it is often controversial. The issues tend to be overwhelming and complex; the victories can seem small and infrequent compared to the remaining injustices.

So many of us are tempted into “pseudo-justice” projects. We want to call it justice but it is really a compassionate response to a justice issue. We feed the homeless, carpool to work, or buy baby formula for a single parent—without really addressing **why** people are homeless, **why** public transportation is inadequate, or **why** the parent isn’t able to work. We help the poor and marginalized, but we don’t really change the system. And that is what justice is all about—changing the system.

Acts of justice create change. The political ramifications or the controversy related to a justice issue often intimidate adults involved in accountable discipleship. The complexity and size

of the problem can overwhelm children and youth. However, with adult guidance and support, children and youth can often achieve small victories.

At the very least, children and youth can understand the difference between acts of compassion and acts of justice. In the process, children, youth, and adults can learn from each other how compassion and justice go hand in hand.

If your group is struggling with the distinction between compassion and justice, perhaps this addendum to Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35) will help. It suggests some actions the Samaritan may have taken in the aftermath of his compassionate response toward the stranger on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. This story illustrates how an act of compassion often leads us toward acts of justice.

A Possible Justice Issue

When the Samaritan got home he talked with his priest about the incident. He and the priest called a meeting of the Church and Society Commission. They discussed how dangerous the

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denari, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'"

Luke 10:30-35 (NRSV)

road from Jerusalem to Jericho had become and how many people had been injured. The group decided to make the road safer. They wrote letters to the centurion in charge of that stretch of road, asking that he increase the soldier patrols and improve the night-time lighting along the road. They instituted a Neighborhood Watch project among the houses and businesses along the road. The Watch group noticed that there were a number of ex-Roman soldiers in the area who had been discharged but had not been able to find a job because their skills were limited to fighting. A number of local farmers hired some of them; a few artisans took others as apprentices. Soon there were no unemployed ex-soldiers unable to support themselves and their families. Within six months, robberies and assaults along the road had been nearly eliminated.

Permission is granted to reproduce this parable for your CD group. Credit should be given to Edie Genung Harris.) Edie is the author of the Sprouts insert in this newsletter and co-author of the book, *Sprouts: Nurturing Children Through Covenant Discipleship* (Discipleship Resources). She is also a member of the Council for Accountable Discipleship.

CD Member Speaks on Prayer



Recently I joined a Covenant Discipleship group, which is a fairly new experience for me. I wasn't sure I wanted to be that accountable for my life as a Christian, trying to follow the teachings and examples of Jesus Christ. We worked together to develop our covenant, putting down on paper the goals we are willing to strive for and commit to—goals that lead us to a life that exemplifies Christ and the gospel.

As a new member I was a bit cautious about what I would be willing to strive for, without too much effort. It was all right with me, until we wrote, 'We will seek to daily practice the presence of God through unceasing prayer.' How was I going to do this? I couldn't pray unceasingly during my waking hours for myself, my family, or my friends. How was I going to work toward this part of our covenant?

My answer: I would pray for persons and situations I see in my daily life. I recall saying a prayer when I saw an ambulance, fire-fighting equipment, or the emer-

gency helicopter landing at a hospital near my workplace. Previously I had said this prayer from time to time, but as a member of this Covenant Discipleship Group, I made it an intentional act. I say, "Creator God, your healing presence be with this family." I say a prayer for persons stranded on the highway; the homeless person at the exit ramp, if I am not able to stop; the mother and children walking to the bus stop; the driver who refuses to allow another driver to merge.

For me, unceasing prayer means intentional prayers for all aspects and situations of my daily life. I still pray for my family and friends, but now many other persons are included in my prayers. Many other persons not even aware of my prayer for God's healing presence in their lives.

Send us your statement on prayer.

JoAnn Catolster is a new member of a Covenant Discipleship Group in Nashville, TN.

How One Lives
esus . . . made clear that being his disciples will be costly. Sometimes people will thank us for the gospel; sometimes they will hate us.

The measure of our love for Jesus will always be our obedience. The world cannot tell what is in our hearts except by how we live.

Jesus told us to love one another, which means helping each other to be obedient to his teachings as proof that we love him. Jesus does not demand perfection from us, but he does expect loyalty.

Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:26-27.

You are my friends if you do what I command you. John 15:14.

Now by this we may be sure that we know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments, is a liar . . . whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk just as he walked. 1 John 2:4-6.

An Excerpt from the
Journal of John Wesley
March 8 1747

On Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, I examined the classes [at Gateshead]. I had been often told it was impossible for me to distinguish the precious from the vile, without the miraculous discernment of spirits. But I now saw, more clearly than ever, that this might be done, and without much difficulty, supposing only two things: First, Courage and steadiness in the examiner. Secondly, Common sense and common honesty in the Leader of each class. I visit, for instance, the class in the Close, of which

Robert Peacock is Leader. I ask, "Does this and this person in your class live in drunkenness or any outward sin? Does he go to church, and use the other means of grace? Does he meet you as often as he has opportunity?" Now, if Robert Peacock has common sense, he can answer these questions truly; and if he has common honesty, he will. And if not, some other in the class has both, and can and will answer for him. Where is the difficulty then of finding out if there be any disorderly walker in this class, and, consequently, in any other? The question is not concerning the heart, but the life. And the general tenor of this, I do not say cannot be known, but cannot be hid without a miracle.

Faith and Works

During the summer of 1738, Wesley visited the Moravian community at Herrnjut. On his return to England, he noted in his *Journal* for October 29 that, while "doubtful of [his] own state," he came upon the words in his Testament that by works faith [is] made perfect" [James 2:22]. On November 12, he "began more narrowly to inquire what the doctrine of the Church of England is concerning the much-controverted point of justification by faith."

The issue was as old as the Reformation; indeed, as old as the church itself. To what extent are good works necessary for our salvation? To what extent does failure to make them a priority of our discipleship detrimental to and even destructive of Christian faith? Wesley's answer was twofold: Forgiveness and reconciliation are matters of the heart; but discipleship is a matter of how one lives. Undue emphasis on good works can deny God's grace, ("works righteousness"),

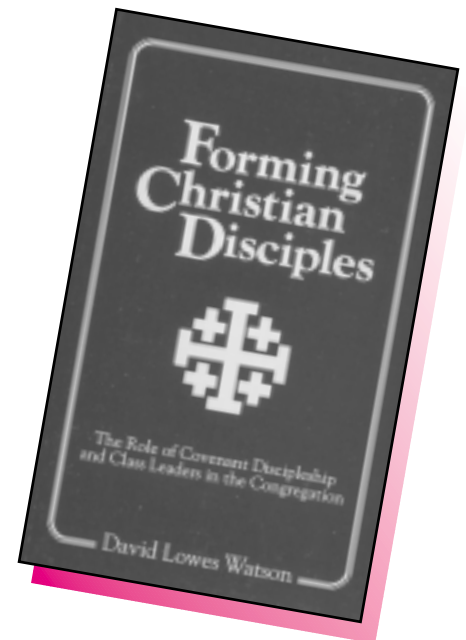
A Matter of Heart & Life

David Lowes Watson



David Lowes Watson

In the Winter issue of *Covenant Discipleship Quarterly* we included an excerpt from Section One of *Forming Christian Disciples: The Genius of Methodist Leadership* by David Lowes Watson. In this issue we complete that section.



but lack of good works can cheapen it ("antinomianism"). Good works are not necessary to *earn* our salvation, but they are necessary to *keep* it.

Reproduced with permission of David Lowes Watson.

Dr. Watson is the author of *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability, Class Leaders: Recovering a Tradition*, and other books.

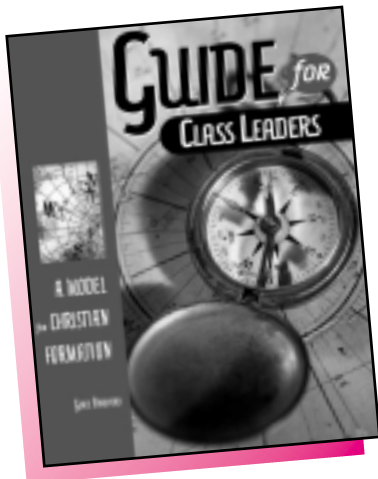
Guide for Class Leaders

A Model for Christian Formation

By Grace Bradford



Grace Bradford



Discipleship Resources, 1999
ISBN 0-88177-274-7

Reviewed by Alyne JoAnn Eslinger, Director, Ministry in Daily Life, Community/Justice Ministries and Accountable Discipleship, General Board of Discipleship, Nashville, TN.

Grace Bradford is a class leader at Asbury United Methodist Church, Washington, DC. She is the *Covenant Discipleship Quarterly* Editor and a workshop leader in accountable discipleship ministries and music ministries.

“Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all other things will be given to you as well.”

You’ve probably heard the term *class leader* and associated it with Covenant Discipleship groups. But you were never really sure of the connection, and you weren’t clear on what class leaders are. If you were asked to identify all the class leaders in your congregation, could you? Isn’t this a concept from John Wesley’s era? Do we still need class leaders? Who are they anyway? These questions and others are floating around our United Methodist churches. And answers are available in Grace Bradford’s *Guide for Class Leaders*.

Bradford begins with a basic understanding and interpretation of class leaders: a ministry of the laity. On page 8 of her *Guide* we read, “Jesus’ disciples were laypeople, just like you, whom Jesus trained to be the leaders he would leave behind on earth to carry out his ministry. Throughout the ages God has called disciples to train other disciples so that the Word, like a seed, would take root and bloom in the lives of those who called themselves his children.”

Class leaders have already demonstrated love for God and a willingness to respond to God’s call to be disciples wherever they may be. Class leaders encourage, nurture, and support other disciples who struggle with or doubt hearing God’s call. Class leaders listen to others’ stories of struggle but do not provide quick and easy answers; rather, they are willing to listen, pray, and discern the call with disciples who are not sure they are ready or “good enough” to become class leaders. Bradford tells us that class leaders

are not beyond struggle and doubt themselves, but they depend on their relationship with God to bring them through such times.

She makes it very clear that *class leaders* is a lay ministry, but that class leaders should not or do not function alone in congregations. A partnership between the class leader and the pastor must be alive and well. In true partnerships, the lay and pastoral leadership interconnect to form a strong viable congregation.

How do class leaders surface? First of all, laity and pastoral leadership must be involved with Covenant Discipleship groups. In her *Guide*, Bradford traces the history of class leaders, beginning with the acts of Jesus as he trained people around him to carry on his ministries. She tells how John Wesley, our founding father, called for small groups as a way to develop a disciplined Christian lifestyle and to watch over one another as each tried to follow Jesus.

Bradford effectively describes the evolving role of small groups and how they provide class leaders for strengthening congregations and membership. By the time you finish this *Guide*, you will have a clear understanding of where and how class leaders came to be. And, above all, you will realize that any persons committed to patterning their lives after Jesus, maintaining their journey in relationship with God, and taking God with them in all aspects of their lives, can be a class leader.

Sprouts has been a growing ministry at Westminster United Methodist Church for five years. For the last three years, laypersons Judi Winner and Bertie Pond have facilitated this ministry. The Sprouts meet Sunday evening 6:00-8:00 p.m. Initially, they met for twelve weeks and took a break for holidays or summer. The interest and commitment have grown to such an extent, however, that they now meet for a full semester at a time.

When the Sprouts ministry was begun in our church, there was no designated budget for resources, paper, crayons, or other supplies. We borrowed from the Sunday school and people donated without being asked. Bertie says that a few church members now support the Sprouts on a regular basis. Last year was the first year that Sprouts was a budgeted item. It is difficult for people to believe that it doesn't take a big budget



Sprouts at Westminster



Sprouts at Westminster

to start a ministry. It only takes the desire to be a disciple of Christ, and the Holy Spirit will help us with our faith.

The Sprouts ministry teaches many spiritual formation objectives that the average Sunday school curriculum does not. The Sprouts at Westminster are in grades 3-5. They begin their meetings by sharing prayer concerns. They review their faithfulness through "covenant time." A lesson is taught on the subject of worship, devotion, justice, or kindness (compassion). Each week, Sprouts participate in a craft project that relates to the lesson or they play a game. Snacks are an important time during the evening—a time to share as well as eat.

The children interviewed find the "covenant time" very meaningful. Nathan Potee commented, "It sounded hard, but making the covenant is a breeze!" Rebekuh MacLean-Blevins said, "The covenant gives us all something to look up to in order to keep focused on God." She added, "I used to pray once in a while, but now I pray every day. Prayer has become a part of my life. It is something that I look forward to each day!"

Tommy Pleasant elaborated on his spiritual growth regarding the quality of his prayers, "I know that prayer is very important! I pray more often and for other people besides my family."

Tommy's older sister Amanda wanted me to mention how important the use of the Children's Prayer Calendar is to her. "I pray for the child of

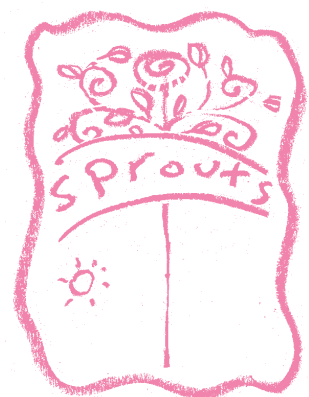
Sprouts Ministry Grows with God's Grace

By Shari M. McCourt

The Sprouts ministry at Westminster United Methodist Church has grown from 6-9 children the first year to 17 in the fifth year. It doesn't take a large budget to begin training the children of your church to become accountable disciples of Christ. It only takes the desire to do as Christ commanded.



Sprouts at Westminster



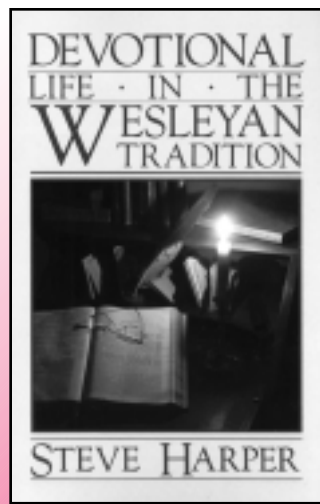
(continued on page 7)

Improving My Prayer Life

By Grace Bradford

Thoughts based on
Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition
By Steve Harper

Harper suggests that instead of reading written prayers by ourselves or others, we should pray them. This causes us to reflect on the words, absorb them, and lift them to God as expressions of our own heart.



No matter how much I pray, I realize there is so much more to prayer than I am experiencing. Paul said we must pray without ceasing. I understand that our constant thoughts and expectations are a part of our prayers. And I know that I waste a lot of time and opportunities. Fears and doubts enter my wandering, mind looking for a place to stay and grow. Other times my prayer list gets long and I just sort of glaze over it.

I have returned to Steve Harp-

er's book, *Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Chapter Two deals with prayer. I underlined a lot of things I wanted to remember. I'll list them here for you, in case you need help with your prayer life too.

Harper begins by pointing out that John Wesley's emphasis was on a "devotional *life*" rather than on a "devotional *time*" (p.18).

Often we designate the early morning hours to our time of devotion. John Wesley started his day that way, beginning with private prayer. For over 50 years, Harper tells us, Wesley got up around 4:30 in the morning to direct his first thoughts to God in order to "create a divine consciousness that would remain with him throughout the day" (p. 20). He was methodical, adhering to a weekly pattern and a daily topic. He built in extemporaneous prayers throughout the day. "He trained his mind to pray on the hour" (p. 21). These were "brief, sentence prayers of praise" (p. 21) uttered inwardly. Then he spent the next 5-7 minutes in meditation.

Wesley prayed privately at the end of the day, reviewing the day, asking forgiveness for sins committed, and deciding ways in which to amend his life.

Some of his prayers, particularly in the morning and in the evening, were prayers he wrote down. "The written prayers provided a focus for his praying and the extemporaneous prayers left room for spontaneity" (p. 20). Written prayers help keep the mind from wandering. Harper suggests that, instead of *reading* written prayers by ourselves or others, we should *pray* them. This allows us to reflect on the words, absorb them, and lift them to God as expressions of our own heart.

Wesley read prayers and other

texts by writers of the classics as well as writers of his day. He gained insight from them and often shared these prayers with others. But, in addition to private prayer, he strongly believed in corporate prayer: "Private prayer alone is not sufficient for a healthy spiritual life, so he consciously looked for ways to pray with others" (p. 23). As a faithful member of the Church of England, he prayed from the *Book of Common Prayer*. He joined others in services of prayer in a church or cathedral, reminding himself of the church as a community of faith and prayer as the focal point for living."

Wesley varied the form of his prayers, praying from the writings of others, as well as using the *Book of Common Prayer*. He prayed aloud and he prayed inwardly. He sometimes combined verbal prayer and hymn singing. "But Wesley also knew the value of silence" (p. 25). His prayers included praise, confession, thanksgiving, intercession, and his own petitions. He expressed joy, sorrow, compassion, concern, and trust. He expressed his doubts, questions and cries of anguish to God.

Like most of us, sometimes we had trouble praying. But he prayed anyway.

Harper concludes this chapter by saying, "Wesley would not want us to examine his prayer life as an end in itself. He never put his spirituality on display. . . . The only reason for looking at Wesley's prayer example is that we will 'go and do likewise'" (p. 26).

No, I would not want to try to imitate Wesley's prayer life, but this chapter has made me examine my own. There are endless opportunities to pray. I have found one in the spa when I go to

(continued on page 7)

Improving My . . . (continued from page 6)

exercise. There are large colorful shapes on the wall—circles, triangles, and squares. In my mind, I put a person from my list on each of the shapes and instead of listening to a music tape, I pray for each of those persons while I walk on the treadmill. Time goes fast and the time is well spent. When I walk in my neighborhood, I look at each house as I walk by and pray for the people in that house. I know that God knows them even if I don't and my prayer for them will be answered in God's way. In traffic, I can pray for people passing me by. It's a way of talking with God and a way of keeping my mind off negative things.

The book *Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition* by Steve Harper includes chapters on scripture, the Lord's Supper, fasting, Christian Conferencing—all areas of the instituted Means of Grace, i.e., those disciplines evident in the life of Jesus Christ. The final chapter is on the prudential means of grace—those disciplines which have been developed by the church to give further order and expression to the Christian life.

What are you doing to improve your prayer life? How can Wesley's practices encourage your own. Let us hear from you.

Excerpts from *Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition* by Steve Harper (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1983), pp. 18-26, used by permission of The Upper Room.



Sprouts Ministry . . . (continued from page 5)

one of our United Methodist Church missionaries who has the same birthday as mine! I also pray for another child pictured in the calendar."

Sprouts ministry makes Christian discipleship a "do-it thing"! "Ms. Winner lets us do things what we don't usually do! We played Bingo with clients at a nursing home. It was fun! The older people were very happy to see us," Amanda exclaimed.

Abby MacLean-Blevins and Tess McCourt talked about the importance of reading Bible stories and acting them out during lesson time. Tess said, "I read my *Pockets* magazine every day! It has a calendar with Bible verses on it, so I know just what to read!"

The Sprouts' favorite activity was working at our local food bank sorting cans of food and helping the clients with their bags of food. Judi and Bertie helped organize twelve Sprouts to collect over two tons of food for the food bank the past few Thanksgivings!

Rebekuh MacLean-Blevins exclaimed, "Helping others makes you feel a lot better about yourself!"

Abby MacLean-Blevins added, "During our visit to the Carroll County Food Sunday, I learned how people live who don't have much money. They have many limits in their diet. If they have spinach for dinner they have to eat it, because spinach might be their only vegetable." All of the children expressed a desire to do more to help families in need.

These children have been involved in many other ministries of compassion and have learned

to make mission a way of life. They have collected supplies for our homeless shelter, made "blessing bags" for children in the hospital, worked in the soup kitchen, and read to clients in nursing homes, to mention a few.

Bertie and Judi shared their secret for making it happen—bringing kids and the community together. They said, "Look at the resources available in your community and make it work!"

As one of their acts of worship, the Sprouts have learned the art of Christian clowning under the direction of Bertie Pond. All of the Sprouts interviewed are excited to continue this aspect of their ministry. They wanted me to affirm in this article how much fun they have. It was the consensus of the group that people should know how important it is for churches to have a Sprouts ministry of their own. Rebekuh MacLean-Blevins is adamant that this ministry should begin at a younger age, suggesting that a ministry could be called "Seeds"!

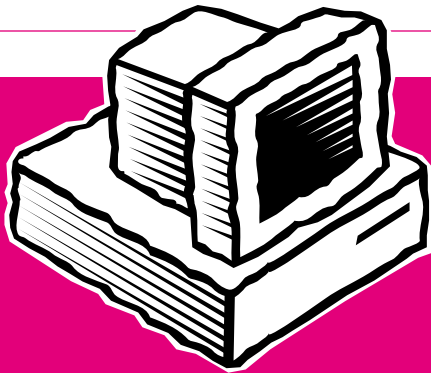
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See insert for additional Sprouts news!

Shari McCourt, a member of Westminster United Methodist Church, is a Candidate for Ordained Ministry as an Elder, a student at Wesley Theological Seminary, a Sprouts resource person, and a member of the Council for Accountable Discipleship. Her three children, including Tess McCourt, have been Sprouts.

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