A Tapestry of Grace: Spiritual Transformation and Corporate Worship in The Wesleyan Church of North America

by

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned candidate, declare that I alone have composed this thesis and completed all the work myself. It has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree. This thesis is the result of my own investigation. All quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.

Signed: Rebecca L. Davis

Dated: 19 December 2023

ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the relationship between a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification and the practices of corporate worship. Wesley expected that regular, intentional participation, with faith, in the practices known as the "means of grace" would be conducive to an experience of sanctification brought by the Holy Spirit. This thesis examines that proposition in relation to the current espoused theology and practices of The Wesleyan Church of North America, and the lived experience of regular attenders of that church.

Wesleyan theology and liturgical studies are considered separately, with an emphasis on the means of grace as the connection between the two fields. The research is focused specifically on three subjects: the doctrine of sanctification, corporate worship, and the means of grace. The body of knowledge regarding the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification is quite robust. There are, however, relatively few examples of extant literature from this perspective regarding worship and liturgy. In-depth discussions of the means of grace in Wesley's thought are also few. Thus, there is a gap in the literature, especially regarding the idea of connecting these three subjects in a scholarly manner as a basis for purposeful practice. This thesis addresses that gap.

Eleven Wesleyans shared their stories of transformational experiences. A key finding that resulted was that, while these people all experienced some level of transformation, they did not necessarily perceive a connection between that experience and their participation in corporate worship, a connection which would have been expected, given a Wesleyan understanding of the transformative nature of the means of grace. An analysis of their comments regarding corporate worship revealed that the means of grace was not part of the discourse in their churches. These findings highlight the need for the Wesleyan leaders to reflect theologically on the corporate worship practices of their congregations.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Locating the research question

This thesis is located in the theology and practices of The Wesleyan Church of North America[1] and the lived experience of people who are a part of that church. To connect the findings into a coherent whole, I will use the metaphor of producing a tapestry, in which the concepts researched and the findings from participants' experiences represent threads of different types or colors that, when woven together, present a picture. The picture I create will reveal what is happening in The Wesleyan Church today in relation to the doctrine of sanctification and the practices of corporate worship.

Wesleyan theology says that our very identity can be transformed by God's grace to be more like Christ. In essence, not only is a person saved from the consequences of sin through justification when they are converted, but they can also be saved from a continuing life of sin when they are sanctified. One of Charles Wesley's more well-known hymns, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," includes the request to "take away our bent to sinning," confirming the Wesley brothers' belief that this is possible. This experience of sanctification can be described as a spiritual transformation, in which the believer is filled, through the power of the Holy Spirit, with holy love for God and neighbor, and subsequently loses the desire to sin. The result of the inner transformation is a change in outward behavior, based not on human endeavor, but on the working of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.

Constance Cherry, in her book *The Music Architect*, makes the bold claim that "the corporate worship event is transformational at its very core."[2] Her claim is based on two suppositions: First, that the content of the liturgy of the church becomes what people believe when they participate in that liturgy over time. Second, what people believe will express itself in how they live. Their lives will be transformed. She says, "This may not be the only spiritual influence on the life of a worshiper, but it is a primary one."[3] Cherry writes from within the

[1] The Wesleyan Church worldwide is somewhat decentralized. There are minor variations in the church's manual known as the *Discipline* from one country to another, as well as variations in practice. For this project, I have limited my research to the North American church. From this point in the thesis, I will refer to the church only as The Wesleyan Church, with the understanding that I am referring to The Wesleyan Church of North America. Additionally, the official name of this denomination is "The Wesleyan Church," including "The." Thus, it will appear capitalized in this thesis.

[2] Constance M. Cherry, *The Music Architect: Blueprints for Engaging Worshipers in Song* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 237.

[3] Ibid.

Wesleyan tradition, making her point of view relevant for the subject of this thesis. Cherry is not the only writer in the field of worship studies who makes this claim, however. Clayton Schmit, in *Worship That Changes Lives,* says,

> Those who are engaged in mere spiritual experiences, such as regular attendance at worship and a habit of prayer and devotion, place themselves in the path of the Spirit's wind. As it blows in and around them, they stand a chance at having their lives changed. …The Spirit blows where it wills and reshapes the lives of those encountered. This is the kind of spiritual transformation that leads people to imitate Christ and to participate in the life of God.[4]

The foundational basis of these claims regarding spiritual transformation is participation in the purposeful practices of worship found in the church.

Richard Foster, in *Celebration of Discipline*, counts worship itself as a spiritual discipline, saying, "One reason worship should be considered a Spiritual Discipline is because it is an ordered way of acting and living that sets us before God so he can transform us."[5] This definition of a spiritual discipline is very similar to what John Wesley called "means of grace." Wesley said, "By 'means of grace' I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace."[6] Henry Knight, in his extensive study on John Wesley's understanding of the means of grace, says this:

> We cannot properly evaluate Wesley's understanding of the Christian life—and his call to Christian perfection—if we examine it outside the liturgical, communal, and devotional contexts within which Wesley himself understood it. …The term for these contexts is the means of grace. …The means of grace include a wide range of activities associated with public worship, personal devotion, and Christian community and discipleship.[7]

This thesis will examine some of the practices known as the means of grace, specifically those that are typically included in a corporate worship service. A discovery of their theological importance will be examined in chapter two, and discussion of them as practices

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[4] Clayton J. Schmit, "Worship as a Locus for Transformation," in *Worship that Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation*, ed. Alexis D. Abernethy (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 37.

[5] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (Toronto: Harper-Collins, 1998), 166.

[6] John Wesley, Albert C. Outler, and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 159.

[7] Henry H. Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ, London: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 2.

will be included in later chapters related to my participants' experience and the worship practices of The Wesleyan Church.

Based on these considerations, my research question is this: **If the content of the liturgy by which people worship week by week is claimed to be a means of grace, and therefore part of the key to the spiritual transformation of believers, can that theoretical connection be identified in the lived experience of Wesleyans today?**

The authors mentioned above and others have claimed that corporate worship is, or should be, a practice that leads to the spiritual transformation of believers. Literature reporting the testimonies of people who have actually had a transformational experience that they relate to corporate worship is rare. There are some stories found in *Worship that Changes Lives*,[8] but nothing that specifically references a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification. Another potential source of narratives found in historical literature is a recently-released collection of testimonies regarding people's spiritual experiences during the Wesley revivals in England.[9] That collection, of course, does not address the experiences of Wesleyans today. I am currently unaware of any qualitative research studies regarding corporate worship and the spiritual transformation of believers in The Wesleyan Church. This question, then, fits perfectly within the discipline of practical theology.

1.2 Practical theology and the relationship between theology and experience/practice.

This thesis is based on the proposition that investigating the lived experience of people in The Wesleyan Church is relevant and needful for a meaningful theological discussion regarding the connection between corporate worship and sanctification. It is not enough to make theological claims alone, nor is it enough to report on people's experience without also examining their theological context. In this section, I will examine the ways in which various scholars representing the academic field of practical theology address the relationship between experience and theology.

Practical theology focuses on the practices and experiences of individuals and communities of faith and how those practices and experiences relate to the more theoretical pursuits of

[8] Alexis D. Abernethy, ed., *Worship that Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

[9] "Conversion Testimonies Transcript Collection," https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/digitisation-services/projects/rapture-and-reason/_files/Conversion-testimonies.pdf.

theological understanding. Taking seriously God's revelation found in the Bible as it has been historically understood by Church tradition, practical theology attends just as seriously to the ways in which people experience God acting in the world and in their lives today, both individually and in community. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat describe practical theology as a discipline that is "prepared to challenge accepted assumptions and practices."[10] This does not mean, however, that human experience is elevated to a place from which it can contradict or replace Scripture, doctrine, or tradition. They add, "It is however to recognize that the questions that we ask of scripture and theological traditions *always* emerge from some context."[11] The individuals who trusted me with their stories of experience in The Wesleyan Church came from particular contexts which have influenced them in particular ways. The contexts that inform people's understanding of who God is and how he interacts with people is constantly "in flux," as noted by Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra, who explain, "Practical theology that takes as its *telos* a life-giving way of life in and for the world is necessarily open-ended…this kind of theology is undertaken not only for the sake of, but also in the midst of, the potentially unlimited range of actual situations and communities within which abundant life can emerge."[12] My purpose for this study is to enhance the "life-giving" effectiveness of The Wesleyan Church for Christian individuals, the church, and the world. The way that faith is experienced by human beings varies greatly. In whatever way it is experienced in each person's situation, the experience of an encounter with the living God shapes people's faith and, ultimately, their understanding of theology. Practical theology's purpose is to enable the Church to be a living, authentic community in and for the world, made up of God's people in all of their unique and diverse expressions. The dual emphases of theology and lived experience, as found in the field of practical theology, is ideal for this project. Understanding the real-life experiences of people in The Wesleyan Church as those experiences interact with and reflect Wesleyan theology is beneficial for individuals in the church as well as for the church as an organization.

Zoe Bennet *et al*. explain that the practice of combining traditional theology and human experience is not a new pursuit, saying, "Theology, particularly Christian theology, is rooted in two thousand years of the experience of communities that have tried to understand and

[10] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2016), 20.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Dorothy C. Bass and Craig R. Dykstra, eds., *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2008), 355.

articulate the meaning and importance of faith and commitment to the divine."[13] In this perspective, experience has always been a part of theological pursuit. Academically, however, theology has often come to be understood as a theoretical field. Bass and Dykstra address the need for practical theology's contribution this way:

> Texts and propositions alone cannot carry or communicate the knowledge of God's grace in Christ that is at the heart of Christian existence. This life-giving knowledge, which dwells in the bodies of believers and in the body they comprise, is gained through forms of active and receptive participation that engage a wide range of human capacities.[14]

The purpose of this study is to explore how participation in the practices of the church, based in the church's theology, have made an impact on the spiritual lives of my research participants. I hope to learn from them how their experiences have communicated to them "the knowledge of God's grace in Christ."

Richard Osmer describes the work of practical theology as central to the Christian Church. "From my perspective," he says, "the core challenge facing practical theologians…is to ground practical theology as a critical, reflective enterprise in the distinctive identity of the Christian community, without eliminating its scholarly contribution and relevance to the common good."[15] Practical theology as reflective practice is, in his words, "situated primarily at the level of pastoral and ecclesial leadership."[16] This is not the only expression of practical theology; there are subjects that may be addressed within the Christian community that are not centered around or dependent on ecclesial leadership or a particular church's theology. Examples include the doctoral thesis of Haley French, who combined the fields of psychology and theology to study the pneumatology of counseling among counselors who professed to be charismatic Christians.[17] Another example is the book by Courtney Goto, *Taking on Practical Theology*, that employs the tenets of practical theology to examine the field of practical theology itself.[18] Neither of these examples include study in the particular practices of churches, except as French describes the background of the "charismatic

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[13] Zoë Bennett et al., *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2018), 8.

[14] Bass and Dykstra, *For Life Abundant*, 358.

[15] Richard R. Osmer, "Practical Theology: A Current International Perspective," *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 67, no. 2 (2011): 5, https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/1058/1925.

[16] Ibid., 2–3.

[17] Haley R. French, "A Practical Pneumatology of Counselling: Understanding the Therapeutic Process through the Lived Experiences of Pentecostal & Charismatic Counsellors" (PhD, University of Aberdeen, 2019).

[18] Courtney T. Goto, *Taking on Practical Theology: The Idolization of Context and the Hope of Community*, Theology in practice Volume 6 (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018).

counsellors" she interviewed. In the case of this project, however, The Wesleyan Church, its doctrines and its practices, are central to the study. Therefore, Richard Osmer's perspective is helpful in analyzing the data, both theological and practical. The church, in all of its varied expressions, is one important focus of practical theology. Theology is expressed through the teachings and practices of churches. How these teachings and practices are experienced by the people who make up the church— "the bodies of believers and the body they comprise," as Bass and Dykstra put it—is the focus of this study. Swinton and Mowat widen the context, addressing the importance of practical theology's influence on the Church and its place in the broader community. They say, "Practical Theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world."[19] Thus, these authors focus their understanding of practical theology on the church and its practices as they relate to the individuals in the church, the community of believers, and the church's purposes in the world.

The factors that will play important roles in this project are traditional theology, lived experience, and the relationship between individual experience and the practices of the Church as they relate to the local community of believers and extend to the world outside the church. John Wesley's theological perspective, developed nearly three hundred years ago, rooted in his study of Scripture, apostolic tradition, and the theology and practices of the Church of England, and worked out in his own experience and the experience of the people in his movement, will be examined through the lived experience of people in contemporary churches that descend from Wesley's original theology. Central to the research question are the ideas of ecclesial practices of worship, a theological understanding of divine action in individual human lives as well as in the life of the church as a community and in the world, and personal lived experiences relating to these ideas.

Although practical theologians may differ on the degree to which they weight the normativity of theology as it is traditionally understood and people's lived experience in relation to that theology, they agree that both are essential. According to Swinton and Mowat, "Practical Theology assumes that human experience is an important locus for the work of the Spirit. As such, experience holds much relevance for enlightening the continuing spiritual task of

[19] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 19.

interpreting and practicing scripture and tradition."[20] Like Swinton and Mowat, this project will focus on not only *interpretation* of scripture and tradition in light of lived experience, but also on *practices* of the church and the relationship of those practices to theological tradition and lived experience. Swinton and Mowat also say, "The task of the practical theologian, inter alia, is to work towards the unification of the Church's theological understandings and her practices in the world."[21] The purpose of this project is to do just that—to compare theological understanding to current practices experienced by people in the church, with a view to the two informing each other, thereby working together in unison to produce a Church whose practices are beneficial for its own members, for the Church as a community, and for the world in which they live.

Ray Anderson, an American practical theologian, says, "actions are themselves theological and as such are open to theological reflection and critique. Thus the praxis of the church is in fact the embodiment of its theology."[22] Rowan Williams, who is not identified as a practical theologian, nevertheless has some insight into this idea. He says,

> I assume that the theologian is always beginning in the middle of things. There is a practice of common life and language already there, a practice that defines a specific shared way of interpreting human life as lived in relation to God. The meanings of the word "God" are to be discovered by watching what this community does—not only when it is consciously reflecting in conceptual ways, but when it is acting, educating or "inducting," imagining and worshipping.[23]

Williams is using the word "practice" in much the same way as Anderson used "praxis."[24] Although it can be argued that these words have different meanings, they are often used interchangeably in the literature. The idea of both Anderson's and Williams's statements is that the visible actions of people reveal their theological understanding. It is not necessary to be talking about theology "in conceptual ways" to be practicing theology.

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 36.

[22] Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 48.

[23] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, Challenges in contemporary theology (Oxford, UK, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), xii.

[24] Andrew Root, "Evangelical Practical Theology," in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, ed. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 88. Root notes that evangelical practical theologians use "praxis" in a way that is not connected to Paolo Freire's "political conscientization." Mark Lau Branson describes it as "study and reflection (including working with theology and other theoretical material) in continual interaction with engagement and action."

Christian practices can be beneficial to those who participate in them with faith, even prior to a reflective understanding of the theology that is expressed by them. As claimed by the scholars quoted above, regularly observing Christian practices, such as the spiritual disciplines or means of grace, may result in a spiritual experience that reveals the ultimate meaning of the practice. This idea will be examined more thoroughly in chapter two. As an example, John Wesley attended to the spiritual disciplines rigorously before experiencing the assurance of salvation at the famous meeting at Aldersgate where he "felt his heart strangely warmed."[25] In his case, he experienced, as Andrew Root would call it, "divine action" while he was involved in what could be called a Christian practice. Anderson differentiates between practice and praxis, saying, "In praxis, God's truth is revealed through the structures of reality by which God's actions and presence are disclosed to us through our own actions. It is not our human actions that constitute the praxis of God. Rather, God acts through our human actions to reveal the truth."[26] For Anderson, then, the difference between "practice" and "praxis" is in the practice's source of meaning—does its meaning derive from the human actions themselves, or from the revelation of God *revealed by* the action? A practice can be done with no particular meaning inherent in it. Praxis, however, reveals its meaning as it is experienced. In Wesley's case, it was listening to Scripture being read and explained, one of his normal religious practices, that became praxis for him as he experienced divine action through it.

As Anderson says, praxis can *reveal* truth to the participant. Additionally, praxis is an embodiment of theology, performing or displaying the beliefs *already* held by participants. Praxis is seen in churches as they worship together, as they reach out to their community, as they send missionaries, and so on. As these actions participate in the theology of the church, they are praxis. As Williams says, "The meanings of the word 'God' are to be discovered by what this community *does*."[27] The practices of the church reveal the community's theology, or what they believe about God, to themselves and to those around them. In the church, theology always informs praxis, but practices also inform theology, as people reflect on why

[25] Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1964), 66. "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." (Quoted from Wesley's *Journal*, I.)

[26] Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 51.

[27] Williams, *On Christian Theology*, xii; emphasis added.

they do what they do, and as they attend to what the lived experiences of those who participate communicates. This concept of praxis fits well with what Bonnie Miller-McLemore describes as the aim of practical theology: "Its ultimate aim lies beyond disciplinary concerns in the pursuit of an embodied Christian faith."[28] Practical theologians ultimately engage in the pursuit of an embodied Christian faith, meaning a spiritual reality that is being worked out in the physical reality in which people live. Swinton and Mowat echo this thought when they write, "Practical Theology acknowledges and seeks to explore the implications of the proposition that faith is a performative and embodied act; that the gospel is not simply something to be believed, but also something to be lived."[29] Praxis is living out the gospel that is believed by means of actions that embody and communicate their *telos*, or ultimate purpose and meaning. The ways in which the theology of The Wesleyan Church is lived out or possibly *not* lived out in its practices will be a primary focus of this thesis, discovered in the reports of my participants' experiences and investigation into contemporary literature. A consistent way to refer to the relationships between the theology claimed by the church and the experiences of its members in practice will be to use the model offered by Helen Cameron *et al*. in the book *Talking about God in Practice.*

Cameron *et al*. offer a model for recognizing and talking about the interplay between theology and practice in the church, called "theology in four voices."[30] These voices are "1) normative theology: the Scriptures, creeds, official church teaching, and liturgies; 2) formal theology: the theology of theologians and dialogue with other disciplines; 3) espoused theology: the theology embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs, and 4) operant theology: the theology embedded within the actual practices of a group."[31] Cameron *et al*. use this model specifically in the specialty of theological action research. While I will not be using TAR in my project, the model of the four voices will nevertheless be a useful tool. Cameron *et al*. maintain, "Recognizing the four voices as a working tool, rather than any kind of complete description of theology, is important."[32] That is how I intend to employ these four voices as I compare Wesley's theology, the current theology of The Wesleyan Church, the various views of scholars, and the theological understanding revealed by my participants'

[28] Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, Wiley-Blackwell companions to religion (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 5.

[29] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 19.

[30] Helen Cameron, *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 53.

[31] Ibid., 56.

[32] Ibid.

stories of their experiences. I will use the four voices model as a tool that enables me to succinctly refer to these differing and yet related sources of theology and their relationship to each other.

This discussion has presented the qualities of practical theology as an academic field that are especially appropriate for the purposes of this thesis. First, practical theology focuses on both an understanding of traditional theology as well as the practices and experience that influence and are influenced by that theology. Theology is approached as embodied belief, expressed by real people living their lives in a concrete reality. Second, the particular focus of this thesis is on the church and its practices, which is one of the foci of the field of practical theology, as expressed by Osmer. The practices of the church influence the beliefs and actions of the individuals in the church, the church as a community, and the world, thus, a study of the practices of the church and what they communicate to people in the church and the world is an appropriate pursuit for practical theology. The idea of praxis, as presented by Anderson, is a way of expressing how practices can reveal truth and be a vehicle for divine action. Finally, the strong relationship between theology and experience found in the field of practical theology needs clear language to describe what is being observed. Cameron's "four voices of theology" will be a helpful model for discussions regarding the various relationships between the theology and experiential practices happening in The Wesleyan Church. The next section describes necessary tasks that must be undertaken prior to beginning this type of research.

1.3 Osmer's Metatheoretical issues

In his paper, "Practical Theology: A Current International Perspective," Richard Osmer addresses what he calls "metatheoretical issues" affecting research in practical theology. He makes a distinction between paradigms that function at the pastoral or ecclesial level, and those that function at "the metatheoretical level of research and theory-construction in practical theology."[33] Osmer identifies four issues on this metatheoretical level to take into account when doing research, because, as he says, "Whilst it may be true that empirical research, social scientific interpretation, normative assessment and pragmatic intervention are found across practical theology today, the ways in which these tasks are conceptualised and

[33] Osmer, "Practical Theology: A Current International Perspective," 2–3.

carried out vary widely because of decisions made at a metatheoretical level."[34] These four metatheoretical issues, as he identifies them, are:

- The theory–praxis relationship: Drawing on philosophy, social theory, and/or theology to make decisions about the nature of praxis or practice and theory's relationship to it.
- Sources of justification: The way in which a practical theologian draws on and weights the traditional sources of theological truth – Scripture, tradition, reason and experience.
- Models of cross-disciplinary work: The task of bringing two or more fields into conversation with one another. It includes the selection of dialogue partners and the way in which they are related to theology.
- Theological rationale: An account of the substantive theological convictions that explain why a practical theologian works in certain ways. It often grounds other methodological commitments or guides the way a practical theologian works on a particular issue.[35]

Accordingly, whatever directions are taken by the practical theologian regarding everything involved in the project will be influenced by these metatheoretical decisions, from the research question and the method of research to interpretation and possible recommendations resulting from the project. I will consider these paradigms here to reveal my approach to this study by addressing the four issues Osmer recommends.

1.3.1.1 Relationship of theory and praxis

This issue is an essential part of Wesleyan theology, which will, of course, play a significant role in this project. This section will review some perspectives of practical theologians. The following section will address this relationship from a specifically Wesleyan viewpoint.

In the many different approaches to practical theology, each reveals its own balance between theory and praxis. *Opening the Field of Practical Theology*, edited by Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski, presents 15 different approaches, or "openings" to the field. Not surprisingly, as an evangelical, I found myself resonating on this issue with the approach in chapter six, "Evangelical Practical Theology," written by Andrew Root. In this chapter, Root describes in general the evangelical idea of practical theology by summarizing the views of several authors; Roberts Banks, Mark Lau Branson, Kara Powell, Chap Clark, and Ray S.

[34] Ibid., 4.
[35] Ibid., 3.

Anderson. Like practical theology generally, the evangelical expressions of the field are varied. Root says that, even though he presents critical comments regarding these evangelical views, he is "appreciative of their attention to divine action, mission, and the authority of the biblical text."[36] These three aspects of evangelical practical theology are, in varying degrees, common to the authors he summarizes. In all except Anderson, according to Root, "There is a deep desire to make room for the authority of scripture; this seems to be a common shared norm for evangelical practical theology."[37] In some of these authors' hermeneutical approaches, "there was a great effort made to always return to the authority of the Bible," which to Root, "at times…felt cumbersome."[38] Ray Anderson's approach is more nuanced, still with a deep respect for a normative view of the Bible, but with more of a balance between Scripture and human experience of divine action. Root says of Anderson's approach, "It is the Bible that is needed to discern the action of the living Christ that the Spirit calls us to join in the world. The Bible then, for Anderson, remains a central norm, not as a destination, as it appears in the other approaches to which to conform, but as a tool to move into practical theological engagement."[39] Ultimately, in evangelical practical theology, the relationship between theory and practice holds to the importance of both Scripture and personal experience, with some variation in the approaches to that relationship. As Root remarks,

> Practice itself rests on a deep commitment to experience. North American evangelicalism has often rested on a deeply held commitment that people have distinct (and real) experiences of God through prayer, worship, and personal relationships. All the evangelical approaches explored above affirm the centrality of an encounter with God.[40]

While Root does not conform completely to any of the approaches he evaluated in his contribution to this book, he developed his own approach that he describes as "inspired by Ray Anderson."[41] This approach, called "Christopraxis," a term also used by Anderson, focuses on divine action in the life of individual believers.

Root's practical theological perspective is revealed in his book, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross*. In it, Root focuses on the actions of Christ in the life of the believer.

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[36] Root, "Evangelical Practical Theology," 80–81.
[37] Ibid., 92.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid., 92–93.
[40] Ibid., 93.
[41] Ibid., 95.

He claims, "If practical theology is to be practical (attending to concrete experience) but yet theological, then it must make central the encounter of divine and human action."[42] There is, however a difference of emphasis in Root's and Anderson's outworking of the idea of Christopraxis.

The important idea that distinguishes Root's program from others is his emphasis on divine action, that is, attention to "the concrete and lived experience of God…in a way that doesn't equate it to or conflate it with human action."[43] While Root, like Anderson, uses the term "Christopraxis," Root gives more weight to lived experience. He says, "A Christopraxis approach begins and in many ways ends with the event of revelation; it centers on what is God's being in God's becoming…This event of revelation I have sought to describe in the lived experience of people."[44] By "God's being in God's becoming," Root means, "Our access to God's being only comes through God's action, so the only God we can know is the God who acts…That the God we know is not imbedded in principles or doctrinal precepts even; that doctrine is definitely second order in a sense."[45] This perspective, he says, is influenced by Karl Barth, Eberhard Jüngel, and Robert Jensen. Root would not go so far as to say that God's ontology is dependent on human experience, but Root's repetition of the phrase "God's being as becoming," along with his explanation of what he means by it, could be interpreted as putting the onus of understanding God's nature on personal human lived experience rather than, or at least above, Scripture or Christian tradition.

Except for this difference, Anderson and Root are very similar in their approach, which is not surprising, since Anderson was the person who introduced Root to practical theology. It seems, however, that Root has taken the practice of practical theology a step away from Anderson's evangelical understanding of the authority of Scripture. Many of Root's assertions are important to my project, including the emphasis on divine action, and even the idea of knowing God through the human experience of God's actions. However, Anderson's reminder that there is an objective reality of God offers a counter-balance. If a person can only know God by what they have personally experienced, then the witness of Scripture and the Church are weakened, if not altogether pointless. Anderson says, "Even as Christ himself

[42] Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 8.
[43] Ibid., 11.
[44] Ibid., 88.
[45] Andrew Root, Voice message via email to Rebecca Davis, 24-Feb-2021.

did not act against the commandments of God but integrated them into his own act of revelation and reconciliation, so the Spirit of Christ in the church does not act against the teachings of Christ in Scripture but integrates them into his own actions of revelation and reconciliation."[46] The emphases of both of these authors are appropriate to this study. My approach will follow both Anderson and Root in emphasizing divine action in the lives of believers while also giving Scripture as understood by Wesleyan tradition an equal voice. This issue of the relationship between theory and practice is addressed in various contexts throughout this thesis. It is also related to the next issue presented by Osmer.

1.3.1.2 Sources of Justification

Osmer's second issue is "sources of justification." For this issue, I draw on the way in which John Wesley approached theology. Osmer lists "Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience" as traditional sources of theological truth. These four words make up what is known among Wesleyan theologians as the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral." Although Wesley himself never used the phrase, reference to these four sources of theological truth run throughout his writing. The phrase itself is attributed to Albert Outler.[47] However, there are differing positions regarding the weight of each of these four sources of truth.

Randy Maddox claims, "Wesley identified Scripture as the most basic authority for Christian faith and life [but] he was explicitly aware that Scripture did not definitively address every possible issue."[48] Clapper adds, "Wesley stated, 'In all cases, the Church is to be judged by the Scripture, not the Scripture by the Church. And Scripture is the best expounder of Scripture.'"[49] In agreement with these statements about Wesley's doctrine, I hold Scripture in high regard. However, my understanding of Scripture is more nuanced than a literal reading of the words found in the Bible. Wesley's understanding of experience is a counter-balance to that sort of narrow way of looking at Scripture.

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[46] Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 54.

[47] Ted A. Campbell, "The 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral': The Story of a Modern Methodist Myth," *Methodist History* 29, no. 2 (1991): 90, http://hdl.handle.net/10516/5736 The "Lambeth Quadrilateral" of 1888 was well known in ecumenical circles. In it, the Lambeth Conference of Bishops of the Anglican communion laid out what they understood to be four essential conditions for a reunited Christian church. Professor Outler borrowed the term from this context as a description for what he understood to be John Wesley's fourfold understanding of religious authority.

[48] Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 39.

[49] Gregory S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and their Role in the Christian Life and Theology*, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies 1 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 19.

Experience is a second component of the quadrilateral. According to Maddox, Wesley's inclusion of experience as a criterion for developing and defending doctrinal positions sets him apart from other theologians of his time. Experience was rarely considered in theological questions.[50] How does Wesley's view of the role of experience compare with the ideas of practical theology today? Of course, Wesley would not have had the same ideas of social science research that we use today. However, he did consider his own spiritual experience and that of other people, along with reason or common sense, when formulating his ideas about what Scripture says about theological issues. Although he followed the doctrines of the Church of England, his ideas were different enough that he was often "disinvited" to preach in those churches because of his breaks from their understanding, especially on this issue of experience. He did not formulate a "systematic theology," but rather formulated theological ideas born out of the lived experience of the people to whom he ministered. Consequently, his theology is sometimes referred to as "folk theology."[51] Gregory Clapper says,

> It is this desire to stay close to concrete reality that made Wesley think long and hard about the relation between felt experience and Christian truth. It is the need for a vision of the Gospel which is fully integrated with the very real and concrete life of the heart…which should make us at least give another hearing to the theology of John Wesley.[52]

The Wesley brothers, John and Charles, even solicited testimonies of spiritual experiences from people in the early years of the Methodist movement in England. Some of these testimonies, in the form of letters to Charles Wesley, are held at the University of Manchester. According to Manchester's website, the letters were "written in response to the request from the Revival leadership for accounts of conversion for use in sermons and publications."[53] Wesley's view of human experience, unusual for his time, was that it was "real"—it deserved enough consideration to re-evaluate some of the long-held doctrines of the Church of England, and influenced the formulation of his own theological views.

Rob Staples argues that Wesley actually held experience, as provided by the Holy Spirit, to be on an equal footing with Scripture, the written expression of the Word. He called this view

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[50] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 44.
[51] Outler, *John Wesley*, iii.
[52] Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 6.
[53] University of Manchester, 21/12/2020, https://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/staff/digitisation-services/projects/rapture-and-reason/.

the "bi-unity" of Word and Spirit, which work together as sources of revelation.[54] He does not discount Wesley's appeal to tradition, or his use of reason, but does not agree with the conception of the "quadrilateral" as four equal partners, or the idea that Scripture is above the other three. Scripture as the written Word cannot be held above experience inspired by the same Spirit who inspired that written Word. Staples asserts that this "bi-unity" of Word and Spirit corresponds with Wesley's use of Scripture and experience as sources of justification. I am in agreement with Staples's perception of how Scripture (Word) and experience (Spirit) work together. If the two seem to disagree, Wesley would have seen it as a lack of his own understanding, and he would have turned to reason and/or tradition to seek an answer.

Reason, the next source of justification, implies the use of human intelligence to think about how things work, or what something means. Thomas Oden describes Wesley's use of reason in this way: "Reason uses sensory experience and logic to understand how the world works, how effects are caused."[55] Wesley did not assume that the traditional understanding of Scripture was necessarily correct if it did not make logical or experiential sense. He often equated reason with the idea of "common sense." "Something is 'reasonable' because a common person with sense would come to the same conclusion."[56] I consider this source of justification a "given" when doing academic research.

The last component of the quadrilateral is tradition. While the word "tradition" can mean different things in Christian thought, Wesley himself viewed Christian tradition broadly, as a source of wisdom to be gained from mistakes of the past as well as a possible source of clarification for "aspects of Scripture that were ambiguous."[57] For me, using tradition as a source of justification involves a specific tradition that is less than three hundred years old, originating with John Wesley. I will use this tradition as a voice in assessing the experience of my research participants, as well as in my examination of the changes in that tradition that affected The Wesleyan Church. This will be an important part of my research.

Osmer suggests determining how these four sources of justification will be used and weighted in a project. Weighting them could be difficult to determine, as these considerations

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[54] Rob L. Staples, "John Wesley's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 96, https://wtsociety.com/files/wts_journal/1986-wtj-21.pdf.

[55] Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 74.

[56] Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 67.

[57] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 43.

are likely to fluctuate, some moving to the fore while others recede, as research progresses. As a starting point, however, this project is based on an understanding of the balanced view of Scripture and Holy Spirit-given experience that is reflected in the Wesleyan tradition from John Wesley until today. Contemporary lived experience will be brought into conversation with these traditions, especially as they are expressed in today's church. The ability to reflect and draw conclusions based on input from a wide variety of sources will require reason. This is a viable approach to my project as a work of practical theology. As Anderson says, "Practical theology…is the process of ongoing critical reflection on the acts of the church in the light of the gospel and in critical dialogue with secular sources of knowledge with a view to the faithful transformation of the praxis of the church in the world."[58] Without critical reflection or the hermeneutical task of allowing all of the aspects of the question to speak to and inform each other, it would be impossible to do justice to the research question.

1.3.1.3 Models of cross-disciplinary work

This project is primarily theological. Human experience of theological concepts will be analyzed in light of the formal and espoused theology of The Wesleyan Church. I will draw from various disciplines outside of theology, namely psychology, anthropology, neuroscience, and education to aid in interpreting what happened to my participants as shared in chapters five and six.

1.3.1.4 Theological Rationale

Osmer's final issue to look at is "theological rationale." The theological rationale for this project is firmly rooted in the Wesleyan doctrines of sanctification and the means of grace and how they relate to corporate worship. I will provide an overview of these subjects in the two literature review chapters following this introduction, and in later chapters I will look for how my participants understand these doctrines and their importance in the stories shared with me.

These four "metatheoretical issues," as described by Osmer, will be woven into the fabric of this thesis, informing my research into the literature, the ways in which I work with the data entrusted to me by my research participants, and the resulting conclusions.

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[58] Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 59.

1.4 Synopsis

This thesis is comprised of ten chapters, including this introduction and a conclusion. A synopsis of the contents of the chapters following the introduction is presented here.

Theological Basis

Following this introductory chapter, I will continue with two chapters of literature review. In the over-arching metaphor of a tapestry, these chapters are the foundation threads that must be stretched on the frame before the pattern can be added. The first chapter investigates the doctrine of sanctification as conceived by John Wesley, followed by later adaptations of his ideas that affected the theology of The Wesleyan Church. In this chapter I will also discuss Wesley's understanding of the means of grace. The second literature review chapter examines corporate worship, giving a theological perspective regarding the practice of corporate worship, concluding with a discussion of the connection between these two chapters. These two chapters provide a foundation for the qualitative interviews that will follow, as the interview questions will be based on my understanding that comes from the literature reviews. Additionally, the literature reviews provide a basis for assessment of the data collected in the interviews.

Methodology

The methodology chapter describes my framework for conducting this research. In the tapestry, this is the combination of procedures necessary to bring the final product to fruition. This chapter includes the theoretical framework of Gadamerian phenomenology, as well as the practicalities of data collection for this project.

From that point on, the chapters will be based on Osmer's "Four Tasks of Practical Theology," which are 1) Descriptive-empirical, 2) Interpretive, 3) Normative, and 4) Pragmatic.[59]

Research Findings

Chapter five will first report on each participant's story of transformation without interpretive comments. Then, the "threads" of the stories will be separated into discrete categories in

[59] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 4.

order to describe what was going on in the stories. As much as possible, in this chapter I will refrain from assigning meaning or interpreting the data beyond the first step of grouping it into categories, which requires some interpretation of what was said.

Multidisciplinary Sense-Making

Chapter six begins the deeper process of interpreting what happened. Threads from the scientific world will be introduced into the tapestry to provide insights that are not available from theological investigation alone. As these threads begin to be woven together with those from chapter five, a partial picture will begin to appear.

Theological Sense-Making

Chapter seven uses the foundational theological threads found in the literature review chapters as well as some additional theological threads related to the multidisciplinary threads from chapter six to produce a clearer picture of not only what happened in the stories related by my participants, but why it happened the way it did. The picture cannot be perfect in every detail, but it will add enough clarity to lead to some conclusions.

Normative Discernment

Chapter eight answers Osmer's question, "What *should* be happening?" in response to the interpretive conclusions drawn from the previous two chapters. This chapter evaluates the combination of theology, practices, and lived experiences, and formulates a critique of what is happening in The Wesleyan Church as experienced by my research participants.

Practical Recommendations

Chapter nine is my working out of Osmer's pragmatic task; giving recommendations for "strategies of action" to correct or enhance the practices of The Wesleyan Church as they were experienced by my research participants. These recommendations will be based the findings of all of the previous chapters, as each chapter informs the others. In all of these chapters, Gadamerian hermeneutics will be practiced, in which all voices, including scholars from various disciplines and perspectives as well as my participants, are heard, and in which each voice has some impact on the other voices. In the tapestry metaphor, each thread is placed alongside the other threads to determine where they belong and how they should be

woven together to create the most accurate and beautiful picture. Some threads will be more prominent than others, but each provides a piece, however small, in the final picture.

Conclusion

The conclusion will summarize and "tie the knots" that hold the whole tapestry together. It will include the main ideas of the thesis and the ways in which they work together to produce a picture of how the subjects of sanctification, the means of grace, and corporate worship are connected, and how Wesleyans today experience this connection, thus answering the research question.

1.5 Disclaimer

Investigating 300-year-old theology necessarily includes literature written in different time periods, involving various sensibilities and traditions. It should be understood that many of the scholars quoted, especially John Wesley himself, used male-gendered language in their writing, usually with neutrally-gendered intention. I have included direct quotations as originally written, while using gender-inclusive language in my own writing.

2 Literature Review – Experience, Sanctification, and the Means of Grace

The purpose behind this chapter's investigation into a specifically Wesleyan-Holiness understanding of experience, sanctification, and the means of grace is to reflect on my theological framework as well as that of my participants, and to establish an overview of positions regarding these particular aspects of Wesleyan theology. Wesleyan theology is the basis for the particular understanding of spiritual transformation held by The Wesleyan Church, which then informs, and also may be informed by, the practices of the church. The next chapter will then consider the topic of corporate worship as it relates to the topics in this chapter. By establishing my expectations of the relationships between these topics as I find them in the literature, I can then engage in meaningful dialogue with the reported experiences of my research participants.

Although the normative theology of The Wesleyan Church is based on the theology of John Wesley, it is not identical. I will first review literature that offers various explanations of Wesley's views on the particular subjects of this chapter, then I will examine some of the changes that occurred over time, especially in the American Holiness movement, of which The Wesleyan Church is a part.

John Wesley never wrote a systematic theology. His theology is spread throughout his sermons, his journals, his letters, and his notes on Scripture, spanning a ministry of over 60 years. His language was not always consistent—he used various words to express the same or similar ideas. For this reason, I have limited my research on Wesleyan theology primarily to those scholars who focus on the subjects that relate specifically to my project, i.e., those who have taken the time to sift through mountains of material to be able to speak with clarity about the specific subjects at hand. While these subjects are also covered in books that present a general overview of Wesleyan theology and some of those will be cited on occasion, the primary scholars I have selected have accomplished a more thorough analysis with a narrow focus on specific aspects of Wesleyan theology that inform my research. My primary dialogue partners for this chapter, besides John Wesley himself, are Gregory Clapper, Timothy Crutcher, Mildred Wynkoop, David McEwan, Henry Knight, and Mark Mann.

Several key terms that are central to the study of Wesleyan theology and corporate worship as they relate to my research will be discussed in the following sections. These terms are *experience, enthusiasm, experimental, affections* and *love* in section 2.1, *holiness, sanctification,* and *perfection* in section 2.2, and *means of grace* in section 2.3.

2.1 The role of experience in Wesleyan theology

The purpose of this section is to describe how John Wesley's understanding of human experience played a role in his theological method. This section will establish a basis for further discussion of the importance of human experience to my research question. As a component in Wesley's theological method, the use of the term "experience" refers to inward spiritual experience, but also to observable life experiences as related to a person's inward experience.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, is often labeled an "experiential theologian."[60] Today's understanding of what he meant by the word "experience" and how he applied it to his theology is not always adequately understood. Even when reading Wesley's own words, there are historical nuances that must be teased out to grasp his intended meaning. The following discussion will shed some light on the role of experience in Wesleyan theology, which has been identified as "one of the distinctive marks of Methodism."[61] Scholars who have studied Wesley in his historical context provide a historically-informed view of what he understood by the word *experience*, as well as various other terms he used in this context. Wesleyans today can benefit from knowledge of Wesley's language of experience to navigate the interaction of human experience with theological understanding while remaining true to their historical foundations.

Experience is one of the four parts of what is known as the "Wesleyan quadrilateral," along with Scripture, reason, and tradition. According to many scholars, these four guiding principles were important to Wesley's understanding of Christian theology. Bevins points out that the other three aspects of the quadrilateral were common to the theologians of Wesley's day. What was missing, he says, "was a spiritual confirmation, or an assurance of salvation within the heart, mind, and soul of the believer." Wesley, in a break with the highly cognitive theological conversations of the enlightenment, "saw the need for a reappropriation of

[60] Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 55.

[61] Winfield H. Bevins, "Pneumatology in John Wesley's Theological Method," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 58 (2003): 107, https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol58/iss2/8.

Christian experience."[62] Wesley was an Oxford scholar and a priest in the Church of England, but he was a pastor to the people who joined the Methodist societies. Collins goes so far as to liken Wesley to an abbot in a Benedictine community, calling him "the spiritual director, par excellence, of the Methodist societal infrastructure."[63] Wesley identified the importance of recognizing human experience in relation to spiritual matters based on his study of philosophy and science, as well as his own lived experience and his observation of and conversations with others. Wesley's desire was that doctrinal and theological truths would be experienced by Christians. He said in his publication "A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity," "May every real Christian say, 'I now am assured that these things are so; I experienced them in my own breast. What Christianity (considered as a doctrine) promised, is accomplished in my soul.'"[64] In Wesley's thought, spirituality that would have the ability to change people's lives could never be merely a matter of mental assent to theological and doctrinal statements; it must be appropriated, and even verified, on an experiential level.

2.1.1 Locating "experience" in Wesley's understanding

2.1.1.1 Contemporary understanding of "experience"

Timothy Crutcher notes that Wesley's understanding of the word "experience" does not conform to today's prevalent understanding of that word as a subjective, personal, passive event that happens to a person, nor is "experience" synonymous with feelings. Crutcher says, "We tend to use the word *experience* today with psychological connotations that do not seem to be present in eighteenth century England. These psychological connotations bias our interpretation of experience toward the private and passive mental synthesis of sensory input into quantifiable events."[65] Crutcher does not discount internal experience, but there is more to Wesley's understanding of the term. Crutcher continues,

> Unless we want to import our modern psychological presumptions back into Wesley, there is little need to create a space for separate, internal experience disconnected from experience as objective criterion. …For a practical person

[62] Ibid.

[63] Kenneth J. Collins, "A Reconfiguration of Power: The Basic Trajectory in John Wesley's Practical Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, no. 1 (1998): 182, https://wtsociety.com/files/wts_journal/1998-wtj-33-1.pdf.

[64] Outler, *John Wesley*, 183–84.

[65] Timothy J. Crutcher, *The Crucible of Life: The Role of Experience in John Wesley's Theological Method*, Asbury Theological Seminary series in world Christian revitalization movements. Pietist/Wesleyan studies no. 1 (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2010), 77.

> like Wesley, our notional ideas are ideas about what can be experienced in life and so don't mean anything *until* they are applied there.[66]

For Wesley, then, experience is something that applies to "real life." It is something that is lived not only internally, but externally as well. It is more than religious subjectivism; it is an internal experience that is reflected in the outward life of a person.

In spite of Crutcher's focus on the application of experience with an "objective criterion," Mercer says that "Wesley proclaimed to all that one could actually sense the presence of the God of the universe and thus be intuitively certain of God's acceptance."[67] Thus, in this sense, "experience" can be something that happens internally, an "intuition." However, this inward, "personal experience" cannot, in Wesley's theology, stand alone as "proof" of anything. According to Maddox,

> Wesley's concern was not that the Spirit directly assure him of this (or any other) doctrinal claim, but that the claim "prove true" in his life and the lives of his people over time. The type of experience that he valued for doctrinal decisions was the *wisdom* acquired through living, not immediate spiritual sensations.[68]

In addition to outwardly observable evidence, spiritual experience, as Maddox says, must be "subordinate to Scripture. [Wesley's] typical way of expressing this was that experience 'confirmed' Scripture. Actually, something more fundamental was taking place; experience was being used to *test* proposed *interpretations* of Scripture."[69] These statements suggest that Wesley placed experience on a nearly equal footing with Scripture. This idea was seen in the discussion on the "bi-unity" of Word and Spirit by Staples in the introduction. A central part of Wesley's focus on "experience" is the idea of the "inner witness of the Holy Spirit." Staples points out that Wesley uses the same language regarding understanding and appropriating the truth of Scripture as for the assurance of salvation and sanctification. He quotes Wesley saying, "There is no power or profit in reading or hearing the Scriptures apart from the accompanying witness of the Spirit of God."[70] Rather than subordinating experience to Scripture, Staples equates the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer to the

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[66] Ibid., 174.

[67] Jerry L. Mercer, "Toward a Wesleyan Understanding of Christian Experience," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (1985): 79, https://wtsociety.com/files/wts_journal/1985-wtj-20-1.pdf.

[68] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 46.

[69] Ibid., 45–46.

[70] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Complete and Unabridged*, 3rd ed., 10 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1979), 188.

idea of "experience," and raises the importance of that inspiration to equal the importance of reading or hearing Scripture in Wesley's thought. Not only did the Holy Spirit inspire the writers of Scripture, he also inspires the readers/hearers of Scripture.

Wesley obviously placed a high value on the Holy Spirit's inner communication to the believer, but his understanding of spiritual experience was misunderstood in his time, much as it could be today, as simply a subjective feeling. This misunderstanding led to Wesley being labeled an "enthusiast."

2.1.1.2 Enthusiasm

Wesley's insistence that a person must experience "in their heart" what they believed intellectually about their Christian faith prompted accusations of "enthusiasm" by many of his contemporaries. This word was used differently in 18th-century England than it is today, especially as applied to religion. Clapper summarizes the idea of enthusiasm by saying it is an extreme subjectivism, in which "the emphasis is on 'feeling' and emotions undisciplined by Biblically informed thinking."[71] Dunn, in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, has this to say about enthusiasm:

> In the English-speaking world, the word [enthusiasm] came to prominence as a technical religious term in the seventeenth century, used always in reference to religious experience, and, for the most part, as a term of denigration. For about two hundred years, the usual usage was to denote ill-regulated religious emotion, or, more specifically, fancied inspiration, the false or deluded claim to have received divine communications or private revelations.[72]

Wesley taught that a person could have an inward conviction that their sins were forgiven and that they were justified before God. In his day, this could be seen as "fancied inspiration" or "private revelation." Outler says, "It was this idea—of the immediate intuition of God's pardoning love—which raised the shout of 'enthusiasm' against the Methodists."[73] Wesley, in the *London Magazine* of 1760, wrote a response to issues raised by his detractors in the magazine. In response to the question, "If every man be furnished with an inward light, as a private guide and director, must it not supersede the necessity of Revelation?" Wesley answered, "The Methodists…allow no inward light but what is subservient to the written

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[71] Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 161.

[72] James D. G. Dunn in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, 16 (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), 118.

[73] Outler, *John Wesley*, 209.

word, and to be judged thereby."[74] This is an example of his balanced view of Spirit and Word, as presented by Staples. Previously, Maddox noted that Wesley expected experience to confirm understanding of Scripture. Here, he expected Scripture to confirm experience.

While it may have seemed clear to the established church of eighteenth-century England that Wesley's movement promoted enthusiasm, Wesley himself expended much energy on refuting this claim, repeating his assertion that he never taught that personal experience should be claimed as a trustworthy source of religious knowledge apart from Scripture. He did, however, expect that personal experience could act as verification of scriptural understanding, and, to go a step further, he taught that scriptural truth *must* be personally appropriated through a personal, inward experience brought by the Holy Spirit to be effective.

2.1.1.3 Experimental Religion

Besides the word "experiential," Wesley also used the word "experimental," which can be confusing in our 21st-century context. Clapper points out that, in 18th-century English, "experience" and "experiment" were cognates.[75] In Wesley's thinking, experience or experiment is an outworking of an *a priori* intuition or belief, resulting in spiritual knowledge that is personally appropriated. However, it is not simple to come to a clear distinction between spiritual experience and what Wesley meant by his religion being "experimental." In the preface to his *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists*, he used the phrase "experimental and practical divinity" in describing the theological significance of the collection of hymns. He said,

> It [the book] is large enough to contain all the important truths of our most holy religion, whether speculative or practical; yea, to illustrate them all, and to prove them both by Scripture and reason. And this is done in a regular order. The hymns are not carelessly jumbled together, but carefully ranged under proper heads, according to the experience of real Christians. So that this book is in effect a little body of experimental and practical divinity.[76]

Wesley used this phrase as if everyone who read it would understand what he meant. Perhaps they did. Wesley's love of logic, and the milieu of the Enlightenment, would lend a scientific

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[74] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Letters*, 3rd ed., 14 vols., 13 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1979), 391–92.

[75] Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 55.

[76] Franz Hildebrandt, ed., *The Works of John Wesley: A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, trans. Oliver A. Beckerlegge, 7 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 74.

bent to this statement. Cushman, although he never actually defines the word "experimental" in Wesley's usage, says this, speaking of holiness: "Does the Spirit of God need to enliven 'a valley of dry bones?' Does 'the *form* of godliness' need to be replaced by the *power* of it? Is this close to scriptural holiness? It would appear so. If it is, it will also be something experienced, and, thus, possibly 'experimental' and so reproducible."[77] Here, Cushman hints at his idea of what is meant by "experimental." It is something that is "reproducible."

Wesley's theological project went beyond the internal assurance of salvation which he recounted as the beginning of his journey. It soon became evident to him that the experience of forgiveness of sin was only part of the story of salvation. Cushman says,

> This [experimental and practical] divinity denotes a doctrinal system best described as mapping the way of salvation. It entails a transformation of human existence that properly issues in "holiness of heart and life," or "Christian perfection." Its distinctive thesis is that the truth of Scripture and the "promises" of God to sinful humanity are, in the first case, confirmed and, in the second, claimed only by living experience empowered by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit.[78]

Observable results, to Wesley, were the outcome of experimental religion. These results might at first only be observed by the individual as an "inward experience," but the results of that inward experience, if true, would become evident to others. The fact that the same types of experiences were claimed by such vast numbers of people during the Wesley revivals served to "prove" his thesis. An important part of the "proof" is that salvation ought to "properly issue in 'holiness of heart and life,'" as Cushman says. In other words, the result of true salvation should be observable to all, and therefore an example of "experimental" religion.

In his sermon, "A Call to Backsliders," Wesley said, "Indeed nothing can be more sure, than that true Christianity cannot exist without both the inward experience and outward practice of justice, mercy, and truth."[79] Wesley expected that outward practice would confirm or deny that a spiritual intuition or a scriptural understanding gained from an inward experience was,

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[77] Robert E. Cushman, *John Wesley's Experimental Divinity: Studies in Methodist Doctrinal Standards* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 36; emphasis in original.

[78] Ibid., 10.

[79] Crutcher, *The Crucible of Life*, 80.

in fact, accurate. It was imperative for him to know if what he taught and what people believed held up to how things worked out in real life for real people.

"Experimental religion" is solidly based on spiritual experience. It includes the combination of cognitive understanding of Scripture and tradition, as confirmed by inward personal experience, with an added element of observable outward behavior that conforms to biblical ideals of holiness. It is "repeatable" in that the same or similar experiences are available, according to Wesley, to all who believe.

In summary, Wesley's use of the word "experience," when applied to his theology, is something of an umbrella term for internally-received spiritual intuition given by the Holy Spirit as well as the resulting external actions and less concrete yet observable changes in attitudes and behavior. The observable results of Wesley's concept of experience will be examined more closely in the following section.

2.1.2 The experience of spiritual transformation

2.1.2.1 Wesley's heart language

"Experiential" and "experimental" describe in general terms how scriptural claims of complete salvation (including justification, sanctification, and glorification), or, in other words, the claims of the gospel, can be personally appropriated. The results of such experimental faith are transformational to what Wesley termed the "affections" or "tempers" of the heart. Gregory Clapper explains Wesley's "heart religion" in this way:

> Wesley sees the gospel as something indisputably "objective" that comes from outside of us as "good news. …However, if our life is not marked by very specific and complex patterns of heart-response to that gospel, we have not really heard or understood the good news. Those patterns of response are what Wesley termed the religious "affections" or "tempers" of the heart.[80]

The re-ordering of the heart's affections in response to the claims of the gospel, as displayed by outward change was, for Wesley, evidence that the testimony of a spiritual transformation was actually true.

Clapper focuses on Wesley's use of "heart language" to further explain the experiential aspect of Wesley's vision. In Clapper's words, "To see what was at stake in his various

[80] Gregory S. Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church: Wesley's Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books/Wipf and Stock Pub, 2010), 3.

claims about 'experience' we have to refer to concrete experiences which typically found expression in the language of emotion. This emotion or affection language...was Wesley's primary mode of expression."[81] While this statement may seem to be in opposition to Crutcher's claim that logic was *a priori* for Wesley, his "heart language" did not oppose logic, but rather explained in human terms, understandable to his hearers and readers, a reasoned account of what happens inwardly and outwardly to a person when they experience spiritual transformation. Clapper uses the term "concrete experiences," but to be clear, he is discussing both internal spiritual experience and outwardly observable change.

According to Clapper, Wesley uses the word "heart" metaphorically in the same way that we use it today and as we find it in our modern translations of the Bible, as "the essential core of a human being—the 'home' of values, desires, hopes,"[82] and also as "the home of the deep and abiding emotions."[83] In Wesley's view, without a change in a person's heart, or, as Clapper expresses it, "*the renewal of the human heart,*"[84] there is no true Christianity. Clapper, in fact, coined the term "orthokardia" to illustrate how important he believes this idea is in Wesley's theology. He says, "If we can free our minds from what our intellectual culture has told us about the heart and its emotions, we can once again claim Wesley's vision of Christianity, consisting of not only right belief (orthodoxy) and right action (orthopraxis), but the right heart of orthokardia."[85] Wesley's own experience of heart renewal is famously condensed to what is called his "Aldersgate experience." Following is what he wrote in his journal on Wednesday, May 24th, 1738:

> 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.[86]

The "heart strangely warmed" phrase has often been used to describe Wesley's initial salvation experience, although Outler says in his biography of Wesley that many spiritual

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[81] Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 2.
[82] Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church*, 33.
[83] Ibid., 20.
[84] Ibid., 27.
[85] Gregory S. Clapper, "Orthokardia: John Wesley's Grammar of the Holy Spirit," in *The Spirit, the Affections, and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Dale M. Coulter and Amos Young (University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 274.
[86] Outler, *John Wesley*, 66; emphasis in original.

experiences led to this moment, and Wesley was to have many more experiences to follow. Outler does point to this particular experience as a turning point in Wesley's spiritual journey, saying, "At Aldersgate he had passed from virtual to real faith, from hoping to having."[87] It is not difficult to see, based on his own experience, why Wesley would place such profound importance on the renewal of the heart.

Heart language is one expression of Wesley's experiential understanding of Christianity. In this light, Crutcher says, "Experience must confirm reasoned and scriptural constructions of theological knowledge for them to have true meaning."[88] There are an abundance of scriptural references to the heart and its central role in Christian faith. For Wesley, the language of the heart is the only way to adequately describe an inwardly-experienced affirmation of the truth of Scripture which results in the transformation of a person's being. In his sermon, "The Marks of the New Birth," he says, "A third scriptural mark of those who are born of God, and the greatest of all, is love: even 'the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them' (Rom. 5:5)," and "The necessary fruit of this love of God is the love of our neighbour, of every soul which God hath made."[89] For Wesley, if Scripture is to be believed, logic demands that this experience of heart renewal is available to human beings, and, in Wesley's thought, it is at the core of true Christianity.

2.1.2.2 Affections

For Wesley, a renewed heart is evidenced by "religious affections."[90] The word *affection* is used differently in 18th-century English than it is commonly used today. An example in the King James Version of the Bible, which would have been in use in Wesley's time, is Colossians 3:2a, which says, "Set your affection on things above." In the New King James Version, this verse is translated as "Set your mind on things above." Today, the word *affection* generally describes a feeling. In the current Cambridge Dictionary, it is defined simply as "a feeling of liking for a person or place." One synonym is "fondness" (https://dictionary.cambridge.org, 11/21). This is not at all how the word should be understood in Wesley's vocabulary. According to Clapper, religious affections in Wesley's teaching are inward dispositions that have been re-ordered to reflect the values found in

[87] Ibid., 17.
[88] Crutcher, *The Crucible of Life*, 158.
[89] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 179.
[90] Gregory S. Clapper, "Wesley's 'Main Doctrines' and Spiritual Formation and Teaching in the Wesleyan Tradition," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 39, no. 2 (2004): 99–100, https://wtsociety.com/files/wts_journal/2004-wtj-39-2.pdf.

Scripture representing holiness, evidenced by outward expressions of the resulting state of the heart. Although Wesley does talk about emotions and feelings, they are not the same as the affections. Clapper's inductive study of Wesley's use of the word *affections,* and more specifically, *religious affections*, shows them to be an integral part of heart renewal. Wesley considered their transformation to be a response to the gospel that begins as a change of heart and results in concrete action in the world. Clapper says, "In *A Farther Appeal,* Part 1, he [Wesley] states that while we *are* meant to *feel* peace, joy and love, the best proof of being led by the Spirit is not merely a sensation but a 'thorough change and renovation of mind and heart, and the leading a new and holy life.'"[91] Similar to Crutcher's inclusion of the outward result of inward intuition in his discussion of experience, Clapper points to concrete action as the *telos* of the "inner phenomena" of the affections.[92] "Theology's first job," Clapper says, "is to describe what Christianity looks like when it is enfleshed by describing the affections it engenders."[93] The concept of religious affections, then, is a way of conceptualizing spiritual experience as it affects the inward dispositions of people.

Although Clapper focuses on the term *affections*, Wesley uses various terminology to describe the idea, including *fruits, tempers, dispositions, and virtues.* Wesley, in describing his vision in the opening paragraphs of "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," says the following: "This is the religion we long to see established in the world, a religion of love and joy and peace, having its seat in the heart, in the inmost soul, but ever showing itself by its fruits...spreading virtue and happiness all around it."[94]

Clapper lists several religious affections spoken of most often by Wesley. These are: thankfulness or gratitude, faith or trust (in God), hope, fear of God, joy, temperance (synonyms for Wesley were meekness and sobriety), peace, happiness, and holiness. Happiness and holiness are often joined in Wesley's thought, and he saw them as the "fruit of righteousness." Importantly, Clapper also says, "No affection is mentioned by Wesley as often as love."[95] Wesley said of love, "It is the root of all the rest," when writing on the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23.[96] It can be argued that Wesley's entire theological

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[91] Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church*, 16; emphasis in original.
[92] Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 80.
[93] Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church*, 13.
[94] John Wesley and Gerald R. Cragg, *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*, The Works of John Wesley 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989, 1975), 46.
[95] Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 86–88.
[96] John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1950), 697.

vision revolves around the idea of love as the greatest affection of all. Consequently, if an affection is an inward disposition evidenced by outward expression, and if love is the one affection that is "the root of all the rest," a brief investigation into Wesley's focus on love is appropriate here.

2.1.2.3 Love, the "sum of all"

In his publication "An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," Wesley called the love of God and neighbor the "sum of all."[97] This treatise, the first of two ("A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" being published later in three parts), was, in essence, a defense of his theological position and of the Methodist movement in general. Wesley's statement that love is the "sum of all" is in relation to what he taught as necessary to salvation, all of it "undeniably contained in the Word of God."[98] In another publication defending his vision, "Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection," he says, "The whole law under which we now are, is fulfilled by love. (Romans 13:9-10)" And to answer the question about what kind of love he is referring to, he answers, "The loving the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength; and the loving our neighbor, every man, as ourselves, as our own souls."[99] This focus on love of God and neighbor is a recurring theme in Wesley's writings, and worthy of attention, as it is the result of sanctification, or what I have called spiritual transformation.

Love has been identified as the key to Wesley's theology, notably in books such as *A Theology of Love* by Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, and *The Life of God in the Soul,* by David B. McEwan. A thorough treatment of this premise is beyond the scope of this project, but will be addressed here for its importance in describing a Wesleyan view of spiritual transformation. The challenge, of course, is identifying what Wesley meant when he spoke of love, and conveying that meaning to a contemporary audience, which, again, may have quite different notions of the meaning of the word than did Wesley. This challenge is identified by Wynkoop in 1972 when she says of a contemporary understanding of the word, "*Love* is a weasel word...*Love* may mean anything—or nothing.[100] To understand Wesley's focus on love, it must be approached from a biblical perspective rather than a contemporary, culturally

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[97] Wesley and Cragg, *The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*, 277.

[98] Ibid.

[99] John Wesley and Mark K. Olson, *John Wesley's 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection': The Annotated Edition* (Fenwick, MI: Alethea In Heart, 2005), 181.

[100] Mildred B. Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*, 2nd ed. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2015), 9.

Western perspective. This is an extensive subject. I will limit the discussion, as much as possible, to the relation of love to the previous discussions of heart renewal and religious affections.

McEwan begins his argument with the words of Jesus which Wesley himself quoted. In Mark 12:28, when Jesus was asked by a teacher of the law to identify the greatest commandment, Jesus replied, "The most important one…is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mk. 12:29-31, NIV) McEwan says,

> Surprisingly, he [Jesus] focuses on love and relationship with the one, true God, and then equally with other people. …The two verses [Deut. 6:4-5, Lev. 19:18] were very well-known, but Jesus links them interdependently and together they clearly place the primary emphasis on loving relationships rather than beliefs, rituals or practices.[101]

McEwan agrees with Wynkoop regarding the challenge of understanding the word "love" rightly. He says, "The danger here is to think of 'love' and 'relationship' as empty terms that we can then fill with our own understanding, and often we simply reduce them to a set of emotions. …The beginning point in understanding the true nature of love and relationship is the Triune God revealed to us in Christ and in Scripture."[102] To summarize McEwan's analysis of Wesley's teaching on love, God's love is expressed relationally, first within the Triune Godhead, and then with humanity. Stemming from creation, the *imago Dei* given to humans is this relational love, found within the Trinity, that defines the biblical concern for holiness. That is, biblical holiness is not some "abstract quality or standard," but is defined by the quality of divine love. This relational, holy love, McEwan says, is "inherently transformative, and as we embark on a relationship with him [God] we will be increasingly changed into the likeness of Christ."[103] In this view, as discussed by Clapper, right action (orthopraxis) flows from a right heart (orthokardia), and a right heart is formed by the experience of a loving relationship with the Triune God. Restoration of the *imago Dei* and the

[101] David B. McEwan, *The Life of God in the Soul: The Integration of Love, Holiness and Happiness in the Thought of John Wesley*, Studies in evangelical history and thought (Milton Keynes, Bucks: Paternoster, 2015), 2–3.

[102] Ibid., 3.

[103] Ibid., 156.

quality of love that implies, i.e., the love that is found within the Trinity, is a recurring theme of Wesleyan theology.

Wynkoop's focus is on correcting what became a legalistic theology of holiness by displaying how Wesley's theology is rooted in biblical, Godly love. She says, "When it is said that love is the dynamic of Wesleyanism, something is said by implication about holiness which is the specific emphasis for which Wesleyanism stands. It says that holiness is dynamic and that the character of holiness is love."[104] This love, she says, is "revealed by God in Christ."[105] To speak of love as an affection, or simply the highest virtue, is inadequate. For Wesley, love is both the starting point of spiritual transformation, because "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit," (Romans 5:5, NIV), and the *telos* of spiritual transformation, evidenced by outwardly observable actions that express the love of our neighbors as ourselves.

While approaching the subject from different starting points, McEwan and Wynkoop are both pointing to the same conclusion: Wesley's entire theological project revolves around love as revealed by God in Christ, and acquired by humans through the action of the Holy Spirit. It is based in the relationality of the Trinity, and revealed in the transformed lives of believers. Beginning with Romans 5:5, and ending with Mark 12:30-31, it can be summed up in a few words from 1 John 4:19, "We love because he first loved us." The purpose of Wesley's experiential religion is wrapped up in these scriptural statements.

2.1.2.4 Summary

The experiential and experimental religion that John Wesley envisioned is based on his understanding that the voices of Scripture and spiritual experience are both essential for the Christian life. Central to this idea is that believers can experience both the assurance of salvation as well as spiritual transformation that enables them to fulfill the scriptural call to "be holy." This spiritual transformation, or sanctification, is expressed, according to Clapper, in Wesley's "language of the heart." Wesley summed up his view of what a transformed, holy life looks like in his sermon, "The New Birth" as follows:

> For what is holiness, according to the oracles of God? Not a bare external religion, a round of outward duties, how many soever they be, and how exactly soever performed. No; gospel holiness is no less than the image of God stamped

[104] Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love*, 22.
[105] Ibid., 18.

> upon the heart. It is no other than the whole mind which was in Christ Jesus. It consists of all heavenly affections and tempers mingled together in one. It implies such a continual, thankful love to him who hath not withheld from us his Son, his only Son, as makes it natural, and in a manner necessary to us, to love every child of man; as fills us with 'bowels of mercies, kindness, gentleness, long-suffering.' It is such a love of God as teaches us to be blameless in all manner of conversation; as enables us to present our souls and bodies, all we are and all we have, all our thoughts, words, and actions, a continual sacrifice to God, acceptable through Christ Jesus.[106]

Thus, spiritual transformation, viewed through a Wesleyan lens, is a radical re-ordering of the objects of the heart's affections. It is orthokardia, based in orthodoxy, resulting in orthopraxis. Immersed in scriptural teaching of holy love and the Church's teaching on the relational love of the Triune God, Wesley found that human beings could personally experience that love, which could transform them from within and enable them to live a holy life. The evidence of the inward transformation of the heart is the transformation of relationships because of the relational love that originates with the Triune God residing in the hearts of humans. It is nothing less than the restoration of the *imago Dei* in humankind, including victory over inherited sin. Thus, the ultimate result of an experience of spiritual transformation, or in Wesley's language, "entire sanctification," is a person whose intentions, values, affections, and relationships are engendered and governed by holy love; a love that originates with the Triune God, is shared by God with humans, is returned by humans back to God and shared with others in tangible ways.

2.2 Historical development of the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification

This section will be a historical overview of one aspect of the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification, namely, the process involved in receiving what has been called "the second blessing," or entire sanctification. My purpose is to trace the Wesleyan teaching of this aspect of the doctrine, beginning with what John Wesley himself taught, through the development of the American Holiness tradition and the changes that occurred as a result of the unique environment of the "New World," ending with what I see as a nuanced return to Wesley's understanding in current thought. This will relate to my research participants' understanding of their transformational experiences, as well as to how my theological understanding and personal background will influence how I interpret what the participants say. All my participants have been attending Wesleyan churches for at least five years. How they assess

[106] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 340.

their transformational experiences will be influenced by the express or implied teaching they have received regarding the church's doctrinal position on sanctification. Even the words the participants use for their transformational experience will speak to their understanding of these practices. The point of this project is not to impose a particular theological understanding onto people's experience, but to situate the participants in a context of thought and practice regarding sanctification and holiness, or spiritual transformation. The participants' prior understanding of and exposure to different forms of this doctrine will inform their own understanding of what they experienced. As I have my own particular experience and history, establishing a broader perspective by examining the literature will improve my ability to engage in hermeneutical analysis of my participants' experiences.

2.2.1 Wesley's teaching on sanctification

2.2.1.1 Perfection

John Wesley used various terminology for what I have broadly called "spiritual transformation." He used the terms "sanctification," "entire sanctification," "full salvation," "the second blessing," "holiness," "Christian perfection," and "perfect love," among other terms.[107] In 1764, he made an attempt to summarize the subject in his publication, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection." He begins a list of "propositions" with, "There is a such thing as **perfection**; for it is again and again mentioned in Scripture."[108] The problem for Wesley was, according to Olson, that people did not understand the scriptural term "perfection" as he did. Olson says, "Judging from the criticism and misrepresentations he received, he should have stressed this point [that it is scriptural] more vigorously and explicitly."[109] Whatever particular terminology he used, the message of Wesley was clear: that people could personally experience God's love, and that love abiding in the hearts of people could change them and make them holy, which would change the way they lived and, ultimately, change their society. This radical idea began to draw people—those who were dissatisfied with a religion of mental assent to propositional statements—to an experience of God which seemed to connect to their everyday lives. Of all the distinctive features of the Wesleyan movement, the one idea at the heart of it is entire sanctification, or Christian perfection. In the previous section I have discussed Wesley's understanding that people could

[107] Roy S. Nicholson, "John Wesley's Personal Experience of Christian Perfection," *The Asbury Seminarian* 6, no. 1 (1952): 74–75, accessed 9-24-2021, https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol6/iss1/8.

[108] Wesley and Olson, *John Wesley's 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection'*, 245; emphasis in original.

[109] Ibid., 246.

be radically changed, and that change could be identified internally as well as outwardly. The following section will focus on the aspect of this doctrine that has yet to be covered here; which is how a believer comes to experience this phenomenon.

2.2.1.2 The stages of salvation

Wesley's understanding of how sanctification is received is, first, tied to his soteriology. "Salvation" for Wesley is a much broader subject than simply the idea of conversion from unbelief to belief in the saving work of Christ. In his sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation" (1765),[110] Wesley presents the stages of salvation as he conceives them. Lindstrom summarizes these stages, saying, "The following factors predominate: 1) The operation of prevenient grace. 2) Repentance previous to justification. 3) Justification or forgiveness. 4) The New Birth. 5) Repentance after justification and the gradually proceeding work of sanctification. 6) Entire sanctification."[111] In this sermon, it is obvious that Wesley believed entire sanctification is a gradual process that leads to an event. In other places, however, he observed that there is the possibility of instantaneous change. In his sermon "On Patience," he recounted interviewing various people who claimed to have received entire sanctification, and that the change "was wrought in a moment."[112] He was so convinced by their testimonies that he concluded this was the most common experience. Taken individually, Wesley's sermons and other published literature often seemed quite definite as to the manner in which this experience would happen. In contrast, in his letters to individual people his words were filled with grace and helpful advice, not claiming that they must experience it in a certain way. To Miss Bishop, he said, "We have other instances of persons who now enjoy the peace of God, and yet do not know the time when they received it. …The Spirit of the Lord can give understanding, either in a longer or in a shorter time."[113] He spoke of the process of waiting, saying, "Sometimes there is painful conviction of sin, preparatory to full sanctification; sometimes a conviction that has far more pleasure than pain, being mixed with joyful expectation. Always there should be a gradual growth in grace; which need never be intermitted from the time we are justified."[114] While encouraging people to expect a process which could include an extended internal struggle, he also encouraged people to pray

[110] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 371.

[111] Harald G. Å. Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1996), 113.

[112] John Wesley, *The Complete Sermons: John Wesley* (Hargreaves Publishing, 2013), 994.

[113] Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 18.

[114] Ibid., 20.

for the event to happen. In a letter to Miss D. Perronet he said, “By and by you shall have the abiding witness of His Spirit; and He will shine upon his own work; and why not now? Ask, and it shall be given you. The Lord is at hand; and He cannot deny himself.”[115] Wesley recognized that human experience of spiritual things cannot be delineated by strict ideas of proper procedure. He never insisted that the process of salvation, from its inception (justification) to its end (glorification) must be the same for every person. He recognized that God knew each person’s heart and what was required for them.

Wesley did not limit how God could work in a person’s life, but he had definite ideas about what people should be doing while waiting and seeking the experience of entire sanctification. After justification and before sanctification, there is an awareness of the sinfulness that remains, and a recognition of one’s own inability to change that state. In his paper “And There is No Health in Us,” Martin Phillips says, “For Wesley, sinfulness taints the whole of the Christian life, which engenders a radical dependence upon the gracious work of the Spirit within which actual transformation into the holy life takes place.”[116] The result of this sometimes painful realization is a longing for relief, which is a necessary part of the process. There follows a second repentance.

This time of internal struggle is of indeterminate length. During this time, Wesley recommends a posture of active waiting. In “The Scripture Way of Salvation” Wesley states:

> There is a repentance consequent upon, as well as a repentance previous to, justification. It is incumbent on all that are justified to be zealous of good works. And these are so necessary that if a man willingly neglect them, he cannot reasonably expect that he shall ever be sanctified. He cannot “grow in grace,” in the image of God, the mind which was in Christ Jesus; nay, he cannot retain the grace he has received, he cannot continue in faith, or in the favour of God.[117]

He goes on to explain what types of “good works” are necessary. He divides them into two categories, “works of piety” and “works of mercy.” He describes the first group as, “All works of piety, such as public prayer, family prayer, and praying in our closet; receiving the Supper of the Lord; searching the Scriptures by hearing, reading, meditating; and using such a measure of fasting or abstinence as our bodily health allows.”[118] It is interesting to note here

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[115] Ibid., 47.

[116] Martin D. Phillips, “"And There is No Health in Us: John Wesley and the Continuity of Sin within the Christian Life” (21 October, 2020), 2.

[117] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons*, 376.

[118] Ibid., 377.

that by saying "such as," Wesley does not claim that these are the *only* works that God can use. This is consistent with his general hesitation to claim conclusive knowledge of how God will work in every person. Of the second group, he says,

> Secondly, all works of mercy, whether they relate to the bodies or souls of men; such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, or sick, or variously afflicted; such as the endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feebleminded, to succour the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death. This is the repentance, and these the fruits meet [fitting] for repentance, which are necessary to full sanctification. This is the way wherein God hath appointed his children to wait for complete salvation.[119]

Again, using the words "such as," Wesley leaves this list open, allowing for variation. Although the content of the lists is important, it is more important to understand why Wesley believed participation in these activities would help a person find sanctification. Do good works earn righteousness?

The "good works" listed in this sermon by Wesley can be equated with the "means of grace." The point of the means of grace, according to Henry Knight, is that they are "means through which persons experience and respond to the loving presence of God."[120] They are human activities, or "works," through which a person is able to experience and participate in the life of God, and through which the person is able to draw nearer to God as a result of that participation. In relation to sanctification, Lindstrom says,

> The function of the means of grace is to "advance inward holiness," to "conduce to the knowledge and love of God." They are ordained "not for their own sake, but in order to the renewal of your soul in righteousness and true holiness." The stress is put on sanctification, not on *favor Dei* and forgiveness. Grace is here seen primarily as a *gratia infusa*, which effects a real, inherent change in the human soul.[121]

Wesley's broader teaching on the means of grace will be examined later, but, as shown here, they are an important element in his understanding of the process of sanctification.

There is one more element that is necessary for entire sanctification, and it is the most important. That is faith. Holiness is not attained by good works. But faith cannot be

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[119] Ibid.
[120] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 2.
[121] Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification*, 122–23.

manufactured in the human heart. Faith itself is a gift of grace. In Wesleyan theology, "prevenient grace" makes it possible for humans to experience saving faith. Knight says, "Prevenient grace…is a gift of God to all persons, making it possible for all to seek God in spite of the effects of original sin."[122] To continue growing in the Christian life following justification, more faith is needed, and, by inference, more grace. Grace is found in the means of grace, including practicing good works.

Immediately before his discussion of good works in "The Scripture Way of Salvation," Wesley says,

> Exactly as we are justified by faith, so are we sanctified by faith. Faith is the condition, and the only condition of sanctification, exactly as it is of justification. It is the condition: none is sanctified but he that believes; without faith no man is sanctified. And it is the only condition: this alone is sufficient for sanctification.[123]

This statement may seem to be in opposition to his continuing discussion of good works following this statement. However, he is likening the faith needed for sanctification to the faith needed for justification. Although justification will result in "fruits meet for repentance (Matt. 3:8)," and if there is never any fruit there is no justification (unless there is no time before death), the fruit is not what *produces* justification—it is produced by faith, and faith alone. In the same way, faith alone produces sanctification. The good works that are done before receiving the experience are not the goal—they are part of the process, imparting grace, resulting in faith.

2.2.2 Disagreements regarding sanctification

2.2.2.1 John and Charles

From the time of John Wesley until today, there have been disagreements and discussions regarding the doctrine of sanctification. Not the least of these disagreements was between John Wesley and his brother Charles. Julie Lunn considers these disagreements based on the theology revealed in Charles Wesley's hymns in her book, *The Theology of Sanctification and Resignation in Charles Wesley's Hymns.*[124]

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[122] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 25.

[123] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 377.

[124] Julie A. Lunn, *The Theology of Sanctification and Resignation in Charles Wesley's Hymns*, Routledge Methodist studies series (New York: Routledge, 2018).

Lunn identifies four theological emphases that are "interwoven throughout the Wesley brothers' grasp of sanctification; though sometimes with different prominence given to the different perspectives, shaped by their divergent views."[125] These four theological emphases are Experiential, Eschatological, Moral, and Liberation.[126] Although the brothers were in general theological agreement, their views on these subjects are pertinent to how sanctification has been understood by their followers until today.

The first, and quite evident difference in the brothers' understanding is whether or not entire sanctification is possible in this life. Lunn says,

> Charles' progressive experience taught him that sanctification was a gradual journey, rather than the instantaneous sanctification John maintained and with which Charles had concurred in the beginning. Consequently Charles came to believe that sanctification could only happen in the article of death, rather than in this life, as John insisted was possible. [127]

This difference, seen from Charles's point of view, was based on his own experience, in which he was convinced of his own continued sinfulness before God. This led to an "uncompromisingly high concept of perfection,"[128] which did not include, as John allowed, "involuntary transgressions."[129] In Charles's own experience as well as his observance of others, he concluded that, although one could grow towards sanctification during their lifetime, the final sanctifying step could only happen at the moment of death. He considered humility an essential virtue to be evidenced by sanctification, and he was "horrified by the behaviour of those who considered themselves to have attained perfection and in whom he struggled to detect that essential virtue."[130] For him, anyone who testified in public to having attained entire sanctification, or perfection, proved that they had not attained it, due to an evident lack of humility. The testimonies of dying believers, on the other hand, who seemed to exhibit perfect humility and peace in the moment of death confirmed to him that individuals could attain entire sanctification in the final moments of life.

This difference of opinion regarding the availability of entire sanctification highlights a different eschatological emphasis in the brothers' thinking. Lunn says,

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[125] Ibid., 12.
[126] Ibid., 8.
[127] Ibid., 9.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid., 22.
[130] Ibid., 14.

> For John…the possibility that sanctification might be received instantly, that the moment might be now, and that this should indeed be expected was fundamental for him; it was an important assertion of God's sovereignty; sanctification was the gift of God and could be given when and how God pleased. John wanted to maintain the possibility of realised eschatology, sanctification now, whereas for Charles the model of an inaugurated eschatology of gradual growth towards holiness is a closer fit. [131]

For Charles, with his deeply personal concept of sin, "the issue was not about the nature of God and God's ability to give the gift, but about the nature of those who claimed to have received it."[132] In Charles's opinion, perfection could not include mistakes. It was complete, or it was not perfect.

Charles's moral perspective is displayed by this insistence that entire sanctification must result in the eradication of sin, and as stated, that eradication must include unintentional sin, or what John called "infirmities." Charles did not believe it could happen during one's lifetime. John also believed that entire sanctification meant deliverance from sin. However, he believed it could happen "here and now,"[133] because, although it produced a significant change in the believer's experience of sin, it did not entail absolute sinless perfection. Thus, the difference between the brothers' moral understanding was located in their conceptions of what should be considered "sin" in reference to Christian perfection or entire sanctification. Another moral perspective, that of liberationist theology, emphasizes a commitment to the poor. This perspective is evident in both brothers' understanding of sanctification. Works of mercy are considered "an embodiment of sanctification"[134] as well as means of grace. This is an area in which the brothers agreed.

John and Charles agreed that entire sanctification is the goal of the Christian life. Fundamentally, however, they did not completely agree about the degree of sinlessness that would be required to claim it, resulting in a disagreement about when it is possible to receive it, or claim to have received it.

2.2.2.2 Maddox and Collins

Related to the disagreement between the Wesley brothers, two aspects of sanctification that are important to this project are 1) whether it is received gradually or instantaneously, and 2)

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[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid., 10.
[134] Ibid., 12.

the dynamics of God's free gift of grace versus the responsibility of humans in the process. These subjects are addressed by both Maddox and Collins, referring specifically to John Wesley's theology, about which they arrive at differing conclusions.

In 1994, Randy Maddox published the book titled *Responsible Grace.* In this book, Maddox proposes that, due to John Wesley's "exposure to the Anglican patristic revival, his acquaintance with several minority Western voices, and some direct reading of early Greek theologians, Wesley incorporated into his anthropology elements that had become typical of both Eastern and Western traditions."[135] The differences in Eastern and Western thought are foundational to Maddox's position regarding salvation, and he describes many of these differences in the third chapter of the book. He refers to the "therapeutic emphasis characteristic of Eastern Orthodoxy," which expresses "the gracious and gradual restoration of humanity to God-likeness."[136] The influence of this Eastern understanding of salvation on Wesley, Maddox says, is "evidenced by his [Wesley's] common definition of Christian salvation as 'the renewal of our souls after the image of God.'"[137] With this foundational understanding, Maddox's views regarding the gradual or instantaneous aspect of sanctification are reflected in his preference for the term *via salutis*, as opposed to the *ordo salutis,* a term frequently used by other scholars to describe the order of salvation. According to Maddox, the "dominant feature" of the *ordo salutis* "is a depiction of salvation as a standard progressive sequence of God's works in the soul"[138] and "more a standard set of abrupt transitions in status than a developing responsive relationship with God."[139] As to what he considers a more accurate description of his understanding of Wesley's soteriology, Maddox agrees with scholars who prefer "'*via salutis,*' arguing that the word 'way' better conveys the gradual dynamics of Wesley's understanding of salvation."[140] This is foundational to his ideas of how sanctification occurs in the believers' life. Secondly, the idea of "responsible" grace in the book's title is that, according to Maddox, "It makes clear that God's indispensable gift of gracious forgiveness and empowerment is fundamental, while capturing Wesley's characteristic qualification of such empowerment as enabling rather than overriding human responsibility."[141] In Maddox's view then, Wesley's soteriology is

[135] Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 66–67.
[136] Ibid., 67.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid., 157.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid., 19.

represented by the combination of God's free offer of grace *and* the human response to it. He is focused on the dialogical relationship between God and his people that results in a gradual experience of sanctification.

Responsible Grace attracted the attention of Wesleyan scholars who subscribe to the idea of *ordo salutis*. One outspoken critic of Maddox's view is Ken Collins, who, in his subsequent two books, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* (1997) and *The Theology of John Wesley* (2007), counters Maddox's conclusions. He clearly articulates his position regarding whether sanctification is gradual or instantaneous, saying, "The Wesleyan order of salvation is not some amorphous process, marked by barely distinguishable increments of grace; instead, it highlights several significant points along the way, qualitatively distinct realizations of grace, some of which are—and remain for Wesley—instantaneous."[142] Collins also disagrees with Maddox regarding the balance between God's free gift of grace and human response to it. He connects this point of contention to the gradual/instantaneous question, saying, "To focus on the first aspect of Wesley's soteriological tension (process) exclusively or to the virtual neglect of the latter (instantaneousness) can only result in a very anthropocentric reading of Wesley's theology where human effort will eclipse the radiance of divine grace."[143] Collins, then, is focused on the sovereignty of God in the process of salvation and the identifiable steps in that process that indicate an instantaneous change.

In reality, both scholars recognize both the sovereignty of God and the ability of humans to respond to the offer of grace. Both scholars also recognize the possibility of both a gradual growth in grace toward sanctification and an instantaneous event. Both scholars based their positions on Wesley's later writings, which they both acknowledged had developed throughout his ministry. Their disagreement is one of emphasis rather than absolute divergence. Even so, the different emphases in these positions affect how Wesleyan believers understand the doctrine of salvation.

According to Maddox's response to Collins in 2000, their disagreement is foundationally based in the difference between Eastern thought and Western thought regarding salvation. Maddox believes that Wesley expressed Eastern thought at the core of his soteriology and

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[142] Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 310–11.

[143] Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 99.

that Collins reflects the Western influence on Wesley as more prominent. Maddox points to the fact that Wesley referred to early Greek theological voices regularly, but serious investigation into how those voices affected Wesley's theology had only "begun to receive scattered attention" when he wrote about it in 1990.[144] The text of his footnote for this claim reveals that Albert Outler was "the one responsible for recovering this agenda in contemporary Wesley studies."[145] Maddox asserts that "Western Christianity has tended to make the soteriological issues of guilt and forgiveness foundational to all others, while Eastern Christianity has tended to make the issues of spiritual impairment and healing most foundational."[146] He applies this point to the "relative valuation given to instantaneous and more gradual transitions in the Christian life."[147] If guilt and forgiveness are the primary issue, then God's forgiveness must be not only instantaneous, it is also divinely unilateral. On the other hand, if spiritual healing is foundational, then there is an "expectation of our continual cooperation with the Great Physician's ministrations,"[148] which may result in gradual *or* instantaneous spiritual healing, but deems neither option theologically necessary.[149] These variations in understandings of sanctification reflect the complicated nature of John Wesley's expressions of his theology of sanctification through the years of his ministry. Wesley developed and sometimes modified his ideas throughout his ministry, as he continued to study Scripture, and as he listened to the experiences of his followers. However, the basic premises that personal experience is essential for true Christianity, and that Christian Perfection (as he defined it) is possible before death, never wavered. He never changed his assertion that the greatest commandment is to love God and neighbor, basing all the rest of his teaching regarding sanctification on this premise. In his eyes, true holiness is a reflection of pure love for God that results in love of neighbor, enabled by the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer. However, it did not take long after Wesley's death for some of his teachings to be changed and/or so narrowly understood and rigidly enforced as to result in harm to the very people they were intended to help. What is true of any organization or movement is that the vision of the founder is often modified by ensuing generations of

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[144] Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences and Differences," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (1990): 30, https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol45/iss2/4.

[145] Ibid., 43 See endnote 2.

[146] Randy L. Maddox, "Prelude to a Dialogue: A Response to Kenneth Collins," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35, no. 1 (2000): 91, https://wtsociety.com/files/wts_journal/2000-wtj-35-1.pdf.

[147] Ibid., 95.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Ibid., 96.

followers. The Methodist movement is no exception. The next section will examine alterations to the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification and the process enabling a person to receive it by what is known as the American Holiness movement.

2.2.3 The American Holiness Movement and the process of entire sanctification

In this section, I will examine how Wesley's vision of the doctrine of sanctification was altered in the generations following his death. To be fair to his followers, they did not all have access to his writings. As mentioned previously, he did not write a systematic theology. Methodists in America relied on the teaching of his successors. Not surprisingly, a doctrine that required extended explanations became simplified and codified to be easily taught. The ambiguities that Wesley was willing to embrace in people's experience of sanctification did not fit into an easily-explained doctrine. The nuances of the differences between John's and Charles's understanding of entire sanctification were lost. The Eastern emphasis on spiritual healing over time was set aside for the Western emphasis on guilt and forgiveness, which must result in an experience of instantaneous sanctification. In the United States, the teachings of one person in particular, Phoebe Palmer, are possibly the most influential to not only the Methodist church, but all of the holiness denominations that sprang from it. These teachings have affected how Wesleyans today conceive of sanctification and how to achieve it.

In 1843, Phoebe Palmer published the first edition of her book, *The Way of Holiness.* In it, she recounted her testimony, writing in third person, as if describing the experience of someone else. Palmer's central thesis, beginning with this book and for the rest of her life, was that entire sanctification was available to Christians without waiting for it. She wrote and preached widely about this experience, calling it "the shorter way."[150] Palmer's influence on the American Holiness movement is undeniable. Harold Raser identifies Palmer (1807-1874) as "perhaps the most significant catalyst in the movement to promote Christian holiness, or entire sanctification …which swept through North American Christianity in the nineteenth century."[151] Similar assessments of her influence were made even during her lifetime. Timothy Smith tells how John P. Newman, "soon to be a bishop [in the Methodist Episcopal Church], declared to an assembly of dignitaries…that Mrs. Palmer was 'the Priscilla who

[150] Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness: With Notes by the Way: Being a Narrative of Religious Experience Resulting From a Determination to be a Bible Christian* (Salem, OH: Schmul Pub. Co, 1988), 22.

[151] Harold E. Raser, *Phoebe Palmer, Her Life and Thought*, Studies in women and religion v. 22 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1987), 2.

taught many an Apollos the way of God more perfectly.' No other Christian woman of the century, he believed, had exerted a comparable influence."[152] The reasons for her success had to do not only with her message, but with the religious and social milieu of her time and place in the world.

In her own words, here is a small portion of Palmer's testimony:

> Conscious that she had *not the witness of entire consecration to God,* neither the assurance that the great deep of her heart, the fountain from whence action emanates, was pure, …and impelled onward also by such an intense desire to be *fruitful in every good work,* …she set apart a season to wait before the Lord, especially for the bestowment of the object…for a moment she hesitated whether she should really determine to continue in a waiting attitude until the desire of her heart was fulfilled; but afterward concluded to rest the matter thus: unless necessarily called away by surrounding circumstances, I will, in the strength of grace, wait till my heart is assured, though it may be all night, and all the morrow too.
>
> And here most emphatically could she say, she was led by a "way she knew not;" so simple, so clearly described, and urged by the word of the Lord, and yet so often overlooked, for want of that child-like simplicity which, without reasoning, takes God at His word. …the Lord, through the medium of faith in his *written word*, led her astonished soul directly into the "way of holiness," where, with unutterable delight, she found the comprehensive desires of her soul blended and satisfied in the fulfillment of the command, "*Be ye holy."*[153]

Palmer developed a theology that offered guaranteed sanctification if a person followed, as Mann describes it, "a simple three-step process: placing one's all on the altar in an act of entire consecration, making a simple act of faith in the promise of God to sanctify that which has been offered up in consecration, and sealing the faith through bearing witness to its reception in public testimony."[154] Palmer's own experience and her deep conviction of the immediate need for a renewal in the American church resulted in her single-minded desire to lead people into "the way of holiness" without delay. As Raser points out, Palmer's experience came at a time when an American version of "revivalism" was a prominent religious phenomenon, and Palmer's "altar theology" fit perfectly into the revival culture of her time. He says,

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[152] Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 122.

[153] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*, 20–22; emphasis in original.

[154] Mark H. Mann, *Perfecting Grace: Holiness, Human Being, and the Sciences* (New York, London: T & T Clark, 2006), 26–27.

> A chief feature of revivalism was its single-minded focus upon bringing about conversions, and its compression of the journey from sin to salvation into a few weeks, a few days, or even a few hours. Phoebe Palmer, in her effort to reawaken Methodism to its perfectionist heritage, …naturally adopted revivalistic machinery to accomplish her goal. Her presentation of the doctrine of Christian Perfection was tailored to the exigencies of camp meeting and protracted meeting. Where the average revivalist pressed for conversion now, Palmer pressed for entire sanctification now.[155]

Although Palmer was a serious follower of John Wesley, she deviated from Wesley's own teaching in several ways. First, as Mann says, "Wesley clearly did not think that the reception of perfecting grace was so clean and neat an operation of faith."[156] Although Wesley encouraged people to pray for the blessing, he also understood that it would not always happen immediately, as shown in the previous discussion of Wesley's teaching about sanctification.

Another way in which Palmer quite radically differed from Wesley, as Mann relates, was "in affirming that there is no need to wait for some inner witness of the Holy Spirit in order to have full assurance of having been entirely sanctified."[157] Wesley quite clearly states, "None, therefore, ought to believe that the work is done, till there is added the testimony of the Spirit, witnessing his entire sanctification, as clearly as his justification."[158] This inner witness was foundational to Wesley's experiential understanding of Christianity. The question arises, then, why would Palmer decide it was unnecessary? The answer goes back to Palmer's own experience. Although she waited for it, she never felt, as she called it, "the witness of entire consecration." Raser says, "Palmer, for whatever cause, her self-diagnosed 'proneness to reason' being part of it, was not able to find sufficient assurance of her acceptance with God according to the subjective criteria offered her by her Methodist mentors."[159] As related in her testimony above, she determined to wait for it. Instead of receiving a subjective sense of assurance in her heart, in the way she understood it was supposed to happen, she was led to Scripture. Her testimony continues as follows:

> "Hath he given the command 'Be ye holy,' and not given the ability, with the command, for the performance of it?" her inmost soul, penetrated with a sense of past unfaithfulness, acknowledged not only the reasonableness of the

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[155] Raser, *Phoebe Palmer, Her Life and Thought*, 258–59; emphasis in original.
[156] Mann, *Perfecting Grace*, 26–27.
[157] Ibid., 27.
[158] J. F. Parker, ed., *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), 61.
[159] Raser, *Phoebe Palmer, Her Life and Thought*, 265–66.

> command, but also the unreasonableness of not having lived in obedience to such a plain Scriptural requirement.[160]
>
> "But *when* and *how* shall I *know* that thou *dost* receive me?" said the importunate language of her heart. The Spirit presented the declaration of the written word in reply, 'Now is the accepted time.' Still her insatiable desires were unsatisfied; and yet she continued to wait with unutterable importunity of desire and longing expectation, looking upward for the coming of the Lord; while the Spirit continued to urge the Scriptural declarations, "'*Now is the accepted time', I will receive you.* Only believe! Trust all, *now* and *forever,* upon the faithfulness of the immutable word, and you are *now* and *for ever* the *saved* of the Lord!"[161]

The solution to avoid having to wait for a "feeling," in Palmer's view, was to put one's faith, cognitively, in Scripture, which says that God requires holiness, and is ready and willing to make it possible. This does not discount her testimony of the Holy Spirit's direction toward Scripture. In her case, her experience led her to the written word.

White explains Palmer's unwillingness to rely on experience in this way:

> The irony of Mrs. Palmer's position about experience is that experience taught her that Scripture is superior to experience. She seems to be trapped in the logical cul-de-sac of arguing on the basis of experience that experience may not always be valid. …When Phoebe learned that she could not depend on experience, she turned to the Scripture for her authority. Convinced of its divine origin, she accepted its truth as the axiom of her existence, and began to rebuild the structure of her faith on this foundation.[162]

In rebuilding the structure of her own faith on Scripture alone, Palmer then imposed her views on those who would seek sanctification under her ministry.

There is a fundamental difference here between Palmer and Wesley. While Palmer placed her faith in the "written word," Wesley advocated placing one's faith in the person of God, with Scripture (which he also believed to be of divine origin) serving as a guide and as confirmation of the validity of one's experience. This can be seen in his journal entry about his experience at Aldersgate, when he said, "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

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[160] Palmer, *The Way of Holiness*, 27; emphasis and capitalization in original.

[161] Ibid., 28.

[162] Charles White, "What the Holy Spirit Can and Cannot Do: The Ambiguities of Phoebe Palmer's Theology of Experience," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (1985): 111, https://wtsociety.com/files/wts_journal/1985-wtj-20-1.pdf.

saved *me* from the law of sin and death."[163] Of course, his trust in Christ was based on a scriptural premise, prompted by hearing Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. The difference is that his trust was not in the words about Christ, but in the person of Christ.

While Palmer's intentions were to promote holiness in the church through the experience of entire sanctification, her methods and message fell short of the fully-developed, balanced theology of John Wesley. But the simplicity of what she preached was easily understood by the public, and it fit well with the American spirit of pragmatism. Palmer's rigid codification of what Wesley taught as a work of grace was a major influence on American holiness denominations well into the twentieth century. Her "shorter way" and "altar theology" were adopted by these churches, included in their denominational manuals, and preached in their pulpits. The following examples of language found in the doctrinal statements of holiness churches reveal how pervasive and enduring Palmer's influence was, well into the twentieth century.

> It is subsequent to regeneration, and is wrought when the believer presents himself a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.[164]
>
> Entire sanctification…is the work of God wrought instantaneously upon the consecrated, believing soul.[165]
>
> Entire sanctification is provided by the blood of Jesus, is wrought instantaneously by faith, preceded by entire consecration; and to this work and state of grace the Holy Spirit bears witness.[166]

The specific use of the word "consecrate," as in a believer "consecrating" themselves and presenting themselves as a living sacrifice, are directly taken from Palmer's writing, and connected to her "altar theology." The expectation that this act by a believer would guarantee the *immediate* experience of entire sanctification was not spelled out in these articles of faith from the various denominations, but was implied by the idea that it happens when one presents or consecrates oneself. These statements are based upon an essential part of Palmer's process. None of these statements indicate a period of growth prior to the act of consecration that results in the "instantaneous" work of God. Mann points out that the idea of consecration

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[163] Outler, *John Wesley*, 66; emphasis in original.

[164] *Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of America* (Syracuse, NY: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing Association, 1951), 17.

[165] The Board of Bishops, ed., *Doctrines and Discipline of the Free Methodist Church of North America: 1951* (Winona Lake, IN: The Free Methodist Publishing House, 1952), 12–13.

[166] John Riley, ed., *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*, trans. S. T. Ludwig et al. (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1960), 29.

is common to both Palmer and Wesley, saying, "both affirmed that the grace of entire sanctification must be preceded by the human act of entire consecration arising from a deepening conviction about one's sin and a growing desire to walk more closely with God."[167] However, while the idea is present in Wesley, the specific word "consecration" in this context is not found in his sermons, and Palmer's "altar theology" is entirely her own. Wesley does, however, use the "living sacrifice" phrase from Romans 12:1 in this context.[168] It is worth noting that the statement from the Church of the Nazarene includes the phrase "the Holy Spirit bears witness," indicating a more "Wesleyan" approach to the experience than Palmer's purely cognitive faith in the veracity of Scripture. The other denominations quoted did not include this phrase.

Palmer's influence is still evident in a sermon by Edward Lawlor, a General Superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene, "Living the Life of Holiness," published in 1974. "And when we have made that complete, irrevocable consecration by faith, we take the fourth step, or meet the fourth condition, which is to *lay hold of the experience by faith*, believing that the altar sanctifies the gift." This statement mirrors Palmer's plan, outlined over 100 years previously, almost exactly. Lawlor added two initial "conditions" that must be met – "First, *there must be felt the need* for such an experience." And, second, *…there must be a complete renunciation* of everything we know to be opposed to the will of God for us."[169] These two "conditions" are also evident in Palmer's personal testimony.

My father, William Armstrong, was a lay pastor in the Free Methodist Church in 1955. His sermon titled "Be Ye Perfect," which also listed similar steps, concluded with this statement:

> When you do these things it will be yours in an instant of time. You'll find that you haven't grown into Christian perfection, no more than when you were converted, or worked into it, but it has been yours by an instant act of faith on your part and an instant work of grace on God's part.[170]

These denominational teachings on the process of entire sanctification are not necessarily invalid—after all, many people have testified to this type of experience. The problem lies in

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[167] Mann, *Perfecting Grace*, 26.

[168] See the sermon, "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption" as an example. Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 144.

[169] Edward Lawlor, "Living the Life of Holiness," in *The Holiness Pulpit: Sermons by Contemporary Leaders of the Holiness Movement*, ed. James McGraw, 2 vols., 2 (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1974), 60–61; emphasis in original.

[170] William Armstrong, "Be Ye Perfect" (Tulare, CA, 16-Oct-1955), 3.

the restriction of the process to only one way, invalidating anyone's experience that deviates from it. The "Way of Holiness" promoted by Phoebe Palmer in the nineteenth century became the *only* accepted process recommended by many holiness denominations in the twentieth century, limiting the acceptance of differing experiences of the sanctifying grace of God. The next section will examine how the conversation has changed in the 21st century.

2.2.4 Current thought

The previous section has traced the evolution of one of Wesley's distinctive doctrines from the way John Wesley actually taught it until its expression in mid-twentieth century American Holiness churches. The purpose of this investigation was to provide background understanding of the way my research participants may conceive of the doctrine of sanctification. This section will present the official position of The Wesleyan Church on the process of sanctification currently, as well as the views of scholars who have attempted to make "course corrections" to the churches in the holiness tradition since the latter part of the twentieth century. Although the authors quoted may be affiliated with other denominations, their views will be applicable to The Wesleyan Church.

2.2.4.1 The shorter way or the middle way

Chris Bounds, in his paper, "Personal Holiness: Grace for Transformed Lives," makes the case that Palmer's theology, or "the shorter way," is the official teaching of The Wesleyan Church. Written in 2008, this paper would have been based on the 2004 edition of *The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church.* Upon simply reading the article of faith in that edition of *The Discipline* about sanctification, this assertion about the Wesleyan position may not seem so clear. This article, titled "Sanctification: Initial, Progressive, Entire," reads,

> …Sanctification is initiated at the moment of justification and regeneration. From that moment there is a gradual or progressive sanctification as the believer walks with God and daily grows in grace and in a more perfect obedience to God. This prepares for the crisis of entire sanctification which is wrought instantaneously when believers present themselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, through faith in Jesus Christ, being effected by the baptism with the Holy Spirit who cleanses the heart from all inbred sin. The crisis of entire sanctification perfects the believer in love and empowers that person for effective service. It is followed by lifelong growth in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The life of holiness continues through faith

> in the sanctifying blood of Christ and evidences itself by loving obedience to God's revealed will. [171]

The statement that "there is a gradual or progressive sanctification as the believer walks with God and daily grows in grace and in a more perfect obedience to God" seems to indicate a position more congruent with what Bounds calls "the middle way." The phrase "the crisis of entire sanctification which is wrought instantaneously when believers present themselves as living sacrifices" is clearly connected to Palmer's "shorter way." Bounds explains the foundational positions about grace and faith that undergird these two views. Of the "middle way," he says,

> Wesley taught that a person is totally dependent on God's grace for the work of salvation, even for saving faith. At each stage or level of progression in the way of salvation, more grace is needed to move forward. […] In the same way, to the grace made available at conversion, more grace must be given in order to make possible the creation of faith necessary to appropriate entire sanctification.[172]

This is in contrast to the foundation for the "shorter way," as he explains it here.

> From the moment of conversion any Christian has the ability to appropriate entire sanctification. Because the Holy Spirit is always ready to respond to a personal act of consecration and faith, only ignorance on the part of a believer, an unwillingness to surrender fully to the Lord, or a lack of will to believe become the root causes for not experiencing entire sanctification.[173]

The difference lies in the understanding of the Wesleyan doctrine of "prevenient grace." If prevenient grace is all that is needed for justification and sanctification, there is no need to wait. If, however, more grace must be made available to create the faith needed to appropriate the gift of sanctification, i.e., through the means of grace, then the "middle way" is more appropriate.

Bounds says that the article of faith on "personal choice" in the *Discipline* indicates that The Wesleyan Church's position is that prevenient grace is all that is needed. This article reads:

> …Because of it [original sin], humans are very far gone from original righteousness, and by nature are continually inclined to evil. They cannot of themselves even call upon God or exercise faith for salvation. But through Jesus Christ the prevenient grace of God makes possible what humans in self effort

[171] Ronald D. Kelly, ed., *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church: 2004* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House), 19–20.

[172] Chris Bounds, "Personal Holiness: Grace for Transformed Lives" (Orlando, FL, 8-June-2008), 4.

[173] Ibid., 3.

> cannot do. It is bestowed freely upon all, enabling all who will to turn and be saved.[174]

While this article mentions the ability to "turn and be saved" because of prevenient grace, it does not specifically mention sanctification in relation to prevenient grace. Despite Bounds's assertion that the Wesleyan Church's official position is for the shorter way, the article on sanctification in the *Discipline* seems to be general enough to fall into either camp, which Bounds admits.[175]

This paper by Bounds was published in a shorter form, more appropriate for general reading by average church people, in the *Wesleyan Life* magazine in 2013. That article does not include as much discussion about theological issues such as the question of prevenient grace. It does still assert that the "shorter way" is the "position expressed in the Articles of Religion of The Wesleyan Church."[176] It must be assumed that the editors of the official magazine of the denomination agreed with this statement. The article concludes by saying all three views (there is also a "longer way" not discussed here [177]) have been used by God in the history of the church and are therefore valid. In his original article, Bounds adds this statement:

> At this point, it may be helpful to point out that in the history of The Wesleyan Church, as well as in the American Holiness movement, the "middle way" is often a default position for Christians holding to the "shorter way." When the "shorter way" has not immediately brought about entire sanctification in people's lives, the "middle way" has been used in offering practical counsel. For example, when people have consecrated themselves fully to Christ and they have done all they know to do to appropriate entire sanctification, and still it remains unrealized, often they are counseled by Christians in the "shorter way" to keep seeking this experience earnestly until God brings it to them. Consciously or unconsciously, there is the recognition of the role of God's timing in this experience.[178]

This observation is reflected in a sidebar in the magazine article, giving counsel to those who "desire to experience entire sanctification." The last section in the sidebar begins with, "If the grace of perfect love is not received when Christians first ask for it, we should persistently seek this experience and the necessary faith. We do this through the various means of

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[174] Kelly, *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church*, 16–17.

[175] Bounds, "Personal Holiness," 5.

[176] Chris Bounds, "Personal Holiness: Grace to Make Our Hearts Right," *The Wesleyan Life Magazine*, 2013, 7, accessed 24-Mar-2022, https://wesleyan.life/magazine/fall-2013.

[177] The "longer way" says that entire sanctification is not possible until the end of life. This view is not represented in most holiness churches.

[178] Bounds, "Personal Holiness," 5.

grace."[179] This is in keeping with Wesley's advice to practice the means of grace and to wait patiently for God to work in God's own way, and is an expression of the "middle way," noting that the way to have more faith is to experience more grace, through the means of grace.

Wesley addressed this question of instantaneous vs. gradual in his *Plain Account.* He said,

> A man may be dying for some time; yet he does not, properly speaking, die, till the soul is separated from the body; and in that instant, he lives the life of eternity. In like manner, he may be dying to sin for some time; yet he is not dead to sin, till sin is separated from his soul; and in that instant, he lives the full life of love. …Yet he still grows in grace, in the knowledge of Christ, in the love and image of God; and will do so, not only till death, but to all eternity.[180]

This quote from Wesley is reflected in the official article on Sanctification from the *Discipline* when it refers to "growth in grace" prior to the "crisis" experience and also subsequent to it. The article in the *Discipline* published in 2004, referenced by Bounds, is the same in the most recent version, published in 2022.[181] The fact that the official statement of The Wesleyan Church can be interpreted in two ways indicates a softening of the previous restrictive understanding of the process of sanctification understood by Wesleyans of former generations.

2.2.4.2 Recontextualizing holiness

Mark Mann's book, *Perfecting Grace*, is a project that can be seen as a call for recontextualizing Wesley's doctrine of holiness for the twenty-first century. Mann uses the sciences, specifically anthropology, the neurosciences, sociology, and psychology to identify ways in which traditional understandings of holiness doctrines can be reimagined today. He says,

> It is my belief that the chief reason for the demise of the teaching and preaching of Christian holiness within the holiness movement has been what theologian Mildred Bangs Wynkoop refers to as a credibility gap between the way that the holiness movement has spoken of holiness and the actual experiences and lives of Christians. Specifically, I contend that the holiness movement has fallen short

[179] Bounds, "Personal Holiness," 11.
[180] Parker, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 62.
[181] Editing Committee, ed., *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2022* (Fishers, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2022), 21.

> of appropriately accounting for the true complexity and richness of human life in its interpretation of Christian holiness.[182]

While it is a good thing to understand Wesley's historical context and ways of thinking and speaking, Mann argues that we cannot continue to express these doctrines in the same way and expect them to connect with people living in today's world. He contends that,

> Based upon the structures of our multidimensionality, our deep relatedness and embeddedness, and because of the various ambiguities of life, we must follow Wynkoop in exercising extreme care when speaking of perfection or entirety, for such language is highly problematic and potentially misleading.[183]

One of the adjustments Mann proposes is "revalorization" of the words and symbols used in speaking of Christian perfection. For example, beginning with the phrase "perfect love" itself, he suggests using the word "perfecting" rather than "perfect," to correct the tendency to think of this type of love as an "absolute or unambiguous quality." Mann does not attempt to "revalorize" every essential phrase or concept found in Wesleyan doctrine; his point is that we need to consider how those words and phrases can be made compatible with the ambiguities and complexities of life while continuing to communicate the possibility of spiritual transformation as envisioned by John Wesley.

One area that Mann addresses is the relationship between sanctification and the means of grace. He identifies a source of disagreement among those in the holiness movement in understanding the process of *how* this event of "momentous grace," called entire sanctification, is received. As discussed previously, and as Mann affirms, this debate generally centers around whether it is an instantaneous work of grace, a progressive growth in grace, or some combination of both. Mann would like to set aside the debate and ask a new question. He says,

> Perhaps, then, we are asking the wrong question when we speak of growth versus crisis. Perhaps we should be asking instead what it is that we can be doing to enhance our responsiveness to sanctifying grace. In other words, what can we do to strengthen our perception, reception, and active responsiveness to the gracious call of God?[184]

Mann then goes on to discuss Wesley's means of grace as a way to accomplish these goals. The means of grace will be examined in the next section. If God calls human beings to be

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[182] Mann, *Perfecting Grace*, 1–2.
[183] Ibid., 156.
[184] Ibid., 166.

holy, Mann would agree with Palmer that God has graciously provided a way for them to become holy. He would not, however, agree with Palmer's conclusion that there is one way, applicable to all people.[185] Mann sees the life of holiness as a journey, enabled by grace on God's part, accessed by responsiveness on the part of humans. By remembering that every person has their own particular, multidimensional history and identity, the message of the possibility of spiritual transformation in the Wesleyan spirit may be recoverable in our complex times, possibly by a renewed interest in the means of grace.

2.2.5 Summary

"How do people in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition understand the doctrine of sanctification?" is not a simple question to answer. The recommended process of acquiring this "second blessing" has had a history of misunderstanding and, in extreme cases, spiritual abuse. Even the desired outcome of the process requires explanation due to the various words used to describe it. In short, the basics of the doctrine are that it is possible for a person's heart to be changed so completely by the work of the Holy Spirit that they love God and his purposes above all else. This change enables people to be free from the desire to sin, and gives them the ability to love others with the love of God that is poured into their hearts. Since it is a work of the Holy Spirit, it cannot be contained by human processes and procedures. However, as Mann says, it requires human responsiveness to God's grace. Mann's recommendation of participating in the means of grace is examined more closely in the next section.

2.3 Means of Grace

Bounds, Mann, and Wesley himself wrote about participation in the means of grace as an important element in the pursuit of sanctification. In general terms, means of grace are Christian practices. Andrew Root says that "practices of the church are…given as gifts to human communities by the eternal God," and that these practices become means of grace as they enable humans to participate in "divine action."[186] Means of grace, then, necessarily incorporate human participation, or activity, combined with the action of God. Bass submits that "To be called 'Christian' a practice must pursue a good beyond itself, responding to and embodying the self-giving dynamics of God's own creating, redeeming, and sustaining

[185] Ibid., 165.
[186] Root, *Christopraxis*, 70.

grace."[187] The phrase "responding to and embodying" is an important understanding of the function of the means of grace as they are used by Wesley. He understood that participation in the means of grace would provide access to grace provided by the Holy Spirit that would enable people to respond to God, leading to an experience of entire sanctification. Thus, these views of the means of grace as Christian practices involving both human and divine action are quite similar to Wesley's understanding.

While Wesley spoke often of the means of grace, and it can be said that they are a prominent part of his theology, the phrase "means of grace" did not originate with him. In his sermon on the subject, he said, "I use this expression, 'means of grace', because I know none better, and because it has been generally used in the Christian church for many ages: in particular by our own church [the Church of England], which directs us to bless God both for the 'means of grace and hope of glory.'"[188] Consequently, this subject was not a novel idea for Wesley. However, the ways in which his ideas regarding the means of grace are woven throughout his theology is noteworthy. My purpose for this section is not to present a thorough discussion of the means of grace, but to provide a basis for understanding how the means of grace connect corporate worship to Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification. His own definition of the means of grace, much quoted, is a good starting point. He said, "By 'means of grace' I understand outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace."[189] While "means of grace" is a term in wider usage than just Wesleyan circles, Wesley's understanding of the types of grace conveyed may be less common. Karen Westerfield Tucker explains it this way: "God conveys to individuals the type of grace that is needed: preventing or prevenient grace, which elicits a first longing for God; justifying or pardoning grace, by which God brings an individual into a saving relationship; and sanctifying or sustaining grace, which enables continued growth in faith and production of faith's fruits."[190] Grace, to Wesley, is not a single idea. The three types of grace are central to his soteriology.

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[187] Dorothy C. Bass, "Ways of Life Abundant," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig R. Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2008), 30.

[188] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 159.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, "Wesley's Emphases on Worship and the Means of Grace," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers, *Cambridge companions to religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 228–29.

Knight presents a thorough treatment of the means of grace in his monograph, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life.* One premise of his work is that, for Wesley, grace is relational. He sums up Wesley's understanding of grace this way:

> Grace for Wesley is most essentially God's triune act of love which has as its goal the renewal of human lives. The foundational act of grace is the atonement of the Son for us; present acts of grace are the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The content of grace is the love of God, which was manifested in Jesus Christ, is presently exhibited through word and sacrament, and is presently applied by the Spirit to each human life.[191]

If grace itself is relational, it follows that the means of appropriating it are also based in relationship. Wesley's understanding of grace and the means to experience it include the idea of a cooperative combination of human and divine action in relationship, as noted in Root and Bass. In addition, according to Knight, participation in the means of grace serves as a preventive measure against malformed Christian theology and practice, because their proper use encourages a relationship with God that includes both knowledge and experience.

Knight outlines the traditional categories of the means of grace as 1) General, 2) Instituted, and 3) Prudential.[192] While these categories are helpful in many discussions of the means of grace, Knight points out a more over-arching understanding of all the means of grace in a way that reveals how Wesley viewed their larger purpose. In his project, Knight presents two categories of the means of grace; first, those that communicate the *presence* of God, and second, those that communicate the *identity* of God. He says,

> While the means of grace cannot be categorized exclusively in terms of presence and identity, a functional typology can be made according to which element in the relationship particular means emphasize. Because of their different emphases, the means of grace are mutually interdependent, and together form a necessary pattern of activity for the Christian life. An impoverished participation in this pattern of means of grace risks the separation of presence and identity, and this diminishes the relationship with God.[193]

Knight's presentation of the means of grace emphasizing either the presence or the identity of God is related to the previous discussions regarding enthusiasm and its related but opposite

[191] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 9.
[192] Ibid., 5.
[193] Ibid., 13.

problem, that of formalism. In both extremes, a balanced practice of the means of grace is missing. He says:

> To use the means of grace which encourage the experience of God's identity without those which encourage attentiveness to God's presence invites formalism; to do the reverse invites enthusiasm. …The Wesleyan pattern of means of grace is essential because it avoids the tendencies toward malformation of the Christian life found in a partial pattern.[194]

Following Knight's assessment, then, an expectation of a sanctified life can only be based on participation in all the means of grace. Wesley himself warned against neglecting any of the means. However, since Wesley suggested that the means of grace was not an absolute list, this caution may be taken as a recommendation to use a balance of both types of the means of grace.

Wesley wrote the sermon "The Means of Grace" in 1746, in response to what he saw as an alarming trend in the Methodist movement. The Moravian and other "quietest" groups were influential in the Methodist movement, as they had been to Wesley himself, helping him to understand that one could have an inner conviction, or assurance, of salvation. However, Wesley broke with the Moravians over the issue of the means of grace. Outler reports that those who followed quietism de-valued the "ordinances" of the church in favor of personal experience alone. He says, "They understood their conversions and 'baptisms of the Spirit' as having superseded their water baptisms, the Eucharist, and all other sacramental acts."[195] Thus, there were some in the Methodist movement who were teaching followers to not participate in any of the practices of the Church of England, not even the Eucharist. An example of this can be read in a letter to Charles Wesley dated 1740, from Martha Jones. She said that, in praying and hoping for "full salvation" (understood as sanctification), "I would not consent to leave of [*sic*] the ordinances though they said we should not go toe [*sic*] church nor pray nor receive the sacrament. These things shocked me not that I trusted in any of these things God by your ministry had taught me better. It was Jesus Christ I wanted and him only I sought in them."[196] Wesley understood that, by encouraging people to seek a personal assurance of salvation, some had misunderstood him and assumed he followed the Moravians. The intention of this sermon was to correct this misunderstanding.

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[194] Ibid., 14.
[195] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 157.
[196] "Conversion Testimonies Transcript Collection," EMV/501/3.

Wesley began his sermon by describing what had happened over time in the Church of England. He said, "In process of time, when 'the love of many waxed cold,' some began to mistake the means for the end, and to place religion rather in doing those outward works than in a heart renewed after the image of God."[197] These are the people that Knight names "formalists," who relied on the form of religion instituted by the church for their salvation. While they participated in the outward actions, according to Wesley, they either forgot that the purpose of the means of grace was to grow in love for God and neighbor, or they believed that God would be pleased with them simply because they practiced the outward means. Wesley soundly condemned the formalists, saying "The things which should have been for their health were to them an occasion of falling."[198]

Immediately following this condemnation of formalists, Wesley then turned on those who "despised" the means of grace. He acknowledged that the people who taught such things at first only meant to show that "the outward ordinances of God then profit much when they advance inward holiness, but when they advance it not are unprofitable and void, are lighter than vanity; yea, that when they are used, as it were, in the place of this, they are an utter abomination to the Lord."[199] Wesley went on to teach his listeners and readers about the purpose of the means of grace, and how they are to be properly used. Wesley pointed to three means of grace in his sermon, saying, "The chief of these means are prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon) and receiving the Lord's Supper, eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of him; and these we believe to be ordained of God as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men."[200] Although he is obviously encouraging participation in the practices, it is noteworthy how often Wesley cautioned in this sermon against the understanding that there is power in the means of grace themselves. As one example of many, he says,

> Settle this in your heart, that the opus operatum, the mere work done, profiteth nothing; that there is no power to save but in the Spirit of God, no merit but in the blood of Christ; that consequently even what God ordains conveys no grace to the soul if you trust not in him alone. On the other hand, he that does truly trust in him cannot fall short of the grace of God, even though he were cut off

[197] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 158.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid., 160.

> from every outward ordinance, though he were shut up in the centre of the earth.[201]

So, if God can and sometimes does convey the same grace that is found by using the means of grace when the means have not been used, what is their purpose? Wesley believed, as he stated at the beginning of his sermon, that the means of grace are the "ordinary channels" which God uses to convey grace, not that God could not work in other ways. He said, "Neither is there any merit in my using this, nothing intrinsically pleasing to God, nothing whereby I deserve any favour at his hands…But because God bids, therefore I do; because he directs me to wait in this way, therefore here I wait for his free mercy, whereof cometh my salvation."[202] Wesley had a view of the means of grace that was based not on the form of the practices, but on his understanding of how God communicates grace to people. In his view, human action by itself profits nothing and has no power to change the hearts of people. On the other side of the coin, Wesley taught that God does not change people's hearts without their participation in the process.

In Knight's ordering of the means of grace, the means "which encourage openness to the *presence* of God include participation in Christian community, works of mercy, extemporaneous prayer, fasting, and the general means of grace." The "general means" include obedience, keeping the commandments, watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily, and exercise of the presence of God. These practices either "enable and encourage us to be attentive to God's presence, …increase our sensitivity to God's presence [or] counteract self-deceptive and presumptive attitudes toward God."[203] Openness to the presence of God provides a check to the tendency to trust in the forms of Christianity rather than the God of Christianity. On the other hand, experience of the presence of God without the knowledge of the identity of God results in an unbalanced and ungrounded Christian life. With a deficient understanding of the nature of the God who is known only by experience, the believer becomes open to deception produced by false doctrine or even their own feelings. Therefore, "the means of grace which encourage the experience of the *identity* of God" are also needed. These include "scripture, preaching, the eucharist, and the prayers of the tradition. These describe the character and activity of God. They give content to our experience of God and thereby make such experiences distinctive; they provide descriptions

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[201] Ibid., 170.
[202] Ibid., 169.
[203] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 13.

of the God who is the object of our affections."[204] All of these means of grace, according to Knight, are necessary to maintain a healthy, balanced relationship with God. A reminder here is in order, that Knight is using these categories as a "functional typology," meaning that the different means of grace cannot always be labeled as only one category or the other, but his project was to emphasize a healthy, balanced relationship with God enabled by a proper usage of the means of grace.

To summarize, grace, administered by the Holy Spirit, is the key to spiritual transformation. It is not acquired through works, but through participation in activities that, as Mann says, "enhance our responsiveness to sanctifying grace."[205] Thus, although Wesley recognized that the Holy Spirit could work in spite of what humans do or do not do, he understood the means of grace to be the normative channels by which the Holy Spirit administers sanctifying grace. In addition, the balanced use of these practices is instrumental in promoting a healthy relationship with God.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a basic overview of the subjects of experience, sanctification, and the means of grace, as found in Wesleyan theology. These subjects are directly related to the purpose of this study, which centers around my participants' experiences in relation to these aspects of Wesleyan theology and their relationship to corporate worship. I began with the role of experience in Wesleyan theology, and how that was viewed in eighteenth century England. Wesley insisted that "true" Christianity must be inwardly experienced as well as outwardly practiced, which was innovative in his time. His view that experience can aid in understanding Scripture is based on the idea that the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures also directly inspires people who read or hear Scripture. Wesley did not believe that experience alone was a reliable basis for theological understanding, but he recommended a partnership of experience and Scripture. Promoting an experience of personal spiritual transformation was considered a radical position in his time.

For this project, the experience of sanctification is of central importance. Part of my research question involves my participants' experiences of spiritual transformation. To reflect on their experiences compared to Wesley's expectations of what the sanctification experience

[204] Ibid.
[205] Mann, *Perfecting Grace*, 166.

included, I needed to research those expectations. A discussion of what Clapper calls Wesley's "heart language" revealed that Wesley expected sanctification to transform the "affections" of the heart, which results in "renewal of the human heart." Wesley's language of the heart, and the re-ordering of the affections is his way of describing the inward experience of faith that affirms Scripture and results in transformation of a person's being. The ultimate result of sanctification as a renewal of the human heart is love, poured into the sanctified heart by God, returned to God, and shared with others in tangible ways.

The idea that a person's heart can be changed so profoundly as to enable them to love God and neighbor completely without the desire to sin, is the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification in a nutshell. The next section detailed the historical development of the doctrine of sanctification, highlighting the differences in Wesley's thought and that of Phoebe Palmer, who deeply influenced the understanding of this doctrine for the American holiness movement. The relevance for my project of this discussion was to provide background for my participants' understanding of the doctrine of sanctification and the process by which it may be attained. In the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, the accepted way to arrive at this place of spiritual transformation has been changed over time, resulting in espoused doctrines that truncate Wesley's vision and de-value differences in personal experience. The current official position of The Wesleyan Church indicates a somewhat less restrictive understanding of this central doctrine of the church.

One of the primary avenues Wesley considered necessary for sanctification, the means of grace, was left behind in the shift to Palmer's "shorter way" theology. Wesley strongly recommended the regular practice of the means of grace as the way to experience spiritual growth leading to the experience of sanctification. Participation in the full spectrum of the different types of means of grace as discussed by Knight is beneficial for a balanced and healthy relationship with God. Part of my investigation into my participants' experiences will be to ascertain if their practices of corporate worship are consistent with Wesley's recommendations regarding the means of grace. The means of grace will be revisited in more detail in the following chapter as the link between the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification and the practices of corporate worship.

3 Literature Review – Participation in Corporate Worship and Spiritual Transformation

The purpose of this chapter is to situate participation in corporate worship as a factor in a Wesleyan understanding of spiritual transformation. Chapter two concluded with the recommendation to practice the means of grace in order to experience spiritual transformation. In this chapter I will describe a basic understanding of Christian worship, and especially corporate worship. I will also address how participation in corporate worship represents the practice of several means of grace. While many of the means of grace may be practiced by individuals outside of a church service, this project focuses on those means that are practiced in community, specifically in corporate worship. "Worship" itself can be understood as a means of grace, but I will focus on the practices that constitute corporate worship, specifically on the means of grace listed by Wesley that are typically practiced in the worship services of Wesleyan churches. Wesley himself did not write extensively about corporate worship, except as he considered those elements constituting it to be means of grace. Scholarly treatments of the subject from an evangelical Wesleyan perspective are few. Thus, scholars from various theological perspectives are included in order to present an overview of the subject as found in the literature.

I will begin the first section with a discussion of the meaning of the word "worship" and the importance of the word "corporate" in relation to worship as it applies to this project. The second section will turn to an examination of the word "liturgy"—what it means, and how it functions in the context of corporate worship, including how it functions as a bearer of the means of grace, connecting it to the doctrine of sanctification as discussed in the previous chapter. For my project, this connection between the practices of corporate worship and the experience of sanctification is key. While the connection found in this chapter will be theoretical, based on the assertions of various authors, I will ultimately be looking for indications of the connection in my participants' stories.

3.1 "Corporate" worship

This section will answer the question, "What is 'corporate' worship, and why is it important to emphasize its corporateness?" Before focusing on what constitutes "corporate" worship, a general definition of worship would be an appropriate starting point. I begin with an injunction to worship God from Psalm 29:2 - "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;

worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness." In the poetic pattern of the Hebrew psalms, the first and second lines of the verse repeat the same idea in different words or with a different emphasis. Thus, to ascribe glory to the Lord is to worship the Lord. This is, of course, not a complete definition; it is merely a place to begin. Nicholas Wolterstorff offers a broader definition of worship along the same lines, describing what "ascribing glory to the Lord" means. He says, "Christian worship of God is a specific mode of Godward acknowledgment of God's distinctive and unsurpassable excellence. Specifically, it is that mode of such acknowledgment whose attitudinal stance toward God is awed, reverential, and grateful adoration."[206] Giving glory to the Lord begins by acknowledging who God is—his "distinctive and unsurpassable excellence." Additionally, for Wolterstorff, worship includes a mode of acknowledgement that displays specific attitudes of awe, reverence, and gratefulness. This definition expands the idea of what worship is, but it does not identify the "mode" that is required, nor does it specifically address "corporate" worship. The acknowledgement of the greatness of God and a response of awe, reverence, and gratefulness is a general definition that can apply to all modes of worship, whether they be of a corporate nature involving the church, or some other form, such as personal or family devotion. "Corporate" worship refers specifically to the practice of worship as found in the community of the church.

Merriam-Webster defines "corporate" as "of, relating to, or formed into a unified body of individuals." It derives from the Latin word, *corpus*, or body (www.merriam-webster.com, accessed 12/23). The "Body of Christ" understood as a corporate or communal entity is a familiar concept in the New Testament. 1 Corinthians 12:27 is quite clear: "Now you [plural] are the body of Christ, and each one of you [singular] is a part of it." In this passage, Paul is writing to a local church. Adding this concept to Wolterstorff's definition of worship, then, denotes a unified group of individuals who identify themselves together as the Body of Christ and participate together in practices that acknowledge "God's distinctive and unsurpassable excellence," and who respond with "awed, reverential, and grateful adoration," as proposed by Wolterstorff. For the purposes of this study, more specific aspects of corporate worship will be helpful. Constance Cherry's book, *The Worship Architect,* focuses on corporate worship from a Wesleyan perspective. She states that the word "worship" may be applied

[206] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Series Introduction," in *Theological Foundations of Worship: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Khalia J. Williams and Mark A. Lamport, *Worship Foundations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), xix.

broadly to various activities, including conferences, personal worship times, and a life of worship, which she calls "worship 24/7." However, she asserts that "there is one worship occasion that stands uniquely above the rest: the weekly worship within the local church."[207] Her reasons for this conclusion are first, that "congregations uniquely experience and embody the resurrected presence of the Lord Jesus Christ within the gathered community."[208] This idea is also found in the work of James Torrance. He writes, "Christian worship is, therefore, our participation through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father, in his vicarious life of worship and intercession."[209] Second, according to Cherry, in this regular practice of worship together in the presence of Christ, "believers are faithfully nourished by Word and Table, exhorted and loved through the human fellowship of sisters and brothers, and emboldened by the Holy Spirit to uniquely announce the good news in word and deed."[210] Thus, while other forms of worship are also beneficial, the communal aspect, or the "corporateness" of public worship in a local church, offers spiritual meaning and human experience that are not available in other modes of worship. With these ideas as a starting point, Cherry offers her definition of worship as corporate worship:

> Worship is the regular, ongoing meeting of a local body of Christian disciples with the triune God, expressed in acts of corporate devotion done in partnership with one another, in order to give glory to God, bear witness to their identity as God's people, proclaim and celebrate the grand narrative of God's eternal activity, and be spiritually formed in Christlikeness and edified by the Spirit for living according to God's kingdom purposes.[211]

Cherry's definition of corporate worship can be broken down into three primary points: 1) It is a corporate meeting of the triune God and believers that is regular and ongoing; 2) It includes practices that give glory to God by bearing witness to the identity of the worshipers as God's children and by proclaiming God's story; 3) It is spiritually formational for the worshipers in both personal Christlikeness and living in the world according to God's purposes. These three points are echoed to varying degrees by the authors that follow.

Brannon Hancock also writes from a Wesleyan perspective, expanding on parts of Cherry's definition. Writing on the centrality of corporate worship to the Wesleyan idea of holiness, he

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[207] Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 2.

[208] Ibid., 3.

[209] James Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 15.

[210] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 3.

[211] Ibid., 303.

writes, "God forms us, individually and collectively, into a holy people through the communal life of the Body of Christ called church. At the center of this communal life is our worship. Worship is the action by which we are made into the Body of Christ."[212] Hancock describes corporate worship as giving "form and shape" to the lives of believers and thus to the church.[213] He posits that personal expressions of worship outside of the community of the church flow out of and are secondary to the practice of "concrete, corporate practices."[214] Beyond the horizontal aspects of community that are available in a corporate setting, Hancock describes the vertical relationship with the triune God as essential to a conception of corporate worship that leads to transformation. In a similar vein to McEwan in the previous chapter, Hancock points to the relationality of the Trinity, and says, "Being created in God's image, we share this inherent relationality. …We receive our true personhood in relation to the Trinity, into whose life we are engrafted because of what Christ has done. Made one with Him, we offer our worship and ourselves to God as a single, holy, living sacrifice."[215] In this quote, Hancock refers to the language of Romans 12:1 – "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." Paul is speaking to a community of believers, the church in Rome. He says to "offer your bodies [plural] as a living sacrifice [singular]." Hancock connects this idea of the communal offering of a single sacrifice to the participation of believers in the life of the Trinity, especially to the work of Christ as the high priest who offers the collective sacrifice of "our worship and ourselves" to God (Hebrews 7:23-28). This vertical aspect of community, or the relationality of believers with the triune God through Christ and how it relates to corporate worship will also be discussed in more detail in the liturgy portion of this chapter. It is, however, important to note it here as a component of what constitutes corporate worship. According to Hancock, the formational aspect of worship is dependent on community, based on the understanding that the corporateness of worship derives from the participation of worshipers in the relationality of the Trinity.

Along similar lines, Tom Greggs speaks of the church participating in the "singular and unique priesthood of Christ as His body" through the action of the Holy Spirit.[216] The

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[212] Brannon Hancock, "Corporate Worship: More Than Icing on the Cake," in *Renovating Holiness*, ed. Josh Broward and Thomas J. Oord (Boise, ID: Elevate Faith, 2015), 406.

[213] Ibid., 407.

[214] Ibid.

[215] Ibid., 407–8.

[216] Tom Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology: The Priestly Catholicity of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 390.

offering of praise to God through Christ the high priest has "a corporate, a communal element" as Christ sanctifies the worship of the church and offers it to the Father.[217] Like Hancock points out in discussing Romans 12, the corporate sacrifice of worship is given to the Father as a single offering. In addition, Greggs notes that by participating in the priestly worship of Christ through the Spirit, "we are orientated (vertically) towards the God who loves the world and lives in superabundant grace, and thereby (horizontally) towards one another and the world which is beloved of God and the theater of God's grace."[218] According to Greggs, then, the way in which participation in the priesthood of Christ through worship can change people is to orient, or realign their affections, as Wesley would say, to love each other and the world with God's love—to have the love of God poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit. In relation to Cherry's definition, both Hancock's and Greggs's views addresses the corporateness of worship, the connection to the Triune God, and the formation of the church as people who love each other and the world. Clapper, in his work on the transformation of the affections, also points to the communal nature of the church as a key element. He says,

> The affections require a society, a community, for both their formation and their expression. The church conveys the story of God's action and provides the liturgical means for forming the affections which the story engenders. And the church and the wider community are the arena for the actions to which the affections dispose the believers. The religious affections for Wesley were fundamentally relational.[219]

Clapper understands that it is not simply the participation in Sunday worship services that is transformational, but it is the relationships formed among the participants that are fundamental to an experience of transformation. People who attend church regularly and participate in the story of God's actions as rehearsed in the liturgy become a community of faith, with shared practices and histories. Participation produces community, and community contributes to the formation of the affections. The formation of affections, in this case, is accomplished by participating in the means of grace called "Christian conference." Clapper's views relate to the second and third points of Cherry's definition—the worship practices of a church form a community that tells God's story and contributes to their spiritual formation.

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[217] Ibid., 391.
[218] Ibid., 393.
[219] Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections*, 169.

Cherry's definition of worship ends with the claim that worshipers will be formed in a way that they will live "according to God's kingdom purposes." This speaks to the idea that a function of corporate worship is to change the hearts of believers until they see the world as God sees it, as noted by Greggs. Brent Peterson writes, "communal worship participates in the further healing of people to become fully human as they are renewed in the *imago Dei* (image of God): to love God, love themselves, love others, be loved, and care for creation as an extension of the first three."[220] This is an expression of Wesley's vision of sanctification, or perfect love, which always ends in service to the world. Clayton Schmit adds, "When Paul says that in Christ we are made new creations (2 Cor. 5:17), he means that we are made to be more like Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, and thereby released to be persons who can act as Jesus in the world."[221] In a beautiful word picture, Schmit says that people who participate in corporate worship "place themselves in the path of the Spirit's wind. As it blows in and around them, they stand a chance at having their lives changed."[222] Spiritual transformation that occurs as a result of worship is God's action when humans place themselves "in the path of the Spirit's wind." This idea corresponds to Wesley's understanding of the means of grace being not only spiritual habits, but actions in which people open themselves to inner transformation brought about by the Holy Spirit. The result is a restoration of the human heart to God's likeness, which will always result in love for the world.

Building on a general definition of worship, this section has outlined aspects of corporate worship that contribute to its transformational quality. Though they concentrate on different components, the authors included all contribute to an understanding of the importance of the "corporateness" of corporate worship. Using Cherry's definition as a basis, corporate worship represents the following three ideas: 1) It is a corporate meeting of the triune God and believers that is regular and ongoing; 2) It includes practices that give glory to God by bearing witness to the identity of the worshipers as God's children and by proclaiming God's story; and 3) It is spiritually formational for the worshipers in both personal Christlikeness and living in the world according to God's purposes. The three foci of Cherry's definition will be seen in various ways throughout the rest of this chapter. For these aspects of corporate worship to come to fruition, they must be included in and communicated by the practices that

[220] Brent D. Peterson, *Created to Worship: God's Invitation to Become Fully Human* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012), 11.

[221] Schmit, "Worship as a Locus for Transformation," 27.

[222] Ibid., 37.

constitute that worship. This is accomplished by the liturgy of the church, which will be discussed in the next section.

3.2 Liturgy

Frank Senn offers a definition of liturgy as follows.

> Liturgy is more but also less than worship. It is more in that it includes elements of rite that are directed to the people as well as to God; it is less in that it is done in public, whereas worship can also be done in private. …Hence liturgy is the vehicle by which the life and mission of the church is celebrated and the public worship of God is offered.[223]

To be very practical, when considering corporate worship in the church, there must be some organization or order governing what happens when a community of Christians gather to worship God. In many evangelical churches, this organizing function is called simply the "order of service" or the "order of worship." In his book *The Wonder of Worship,* Keith Drury, a Wesleyan author, simply defines liturgy as "A formula for public worship: the usual order of worship."[224] Except for specific rites such as baptism and communion, this "formula" is not prescribed by the Wesleyan denomination. In The Wesleyan Church, the word "liturgy" is rarely used. However, this does not negate the fact that liturgy is present in these churches and in every corporate worship service. The question, then, is, how can the term be understood in a way that is helpful for "non-liturgical" churches? The following sections regarding liturgy will include an investigation into the meaning of the word itself, followed by a discussion of the functions of liturgy. These functions include the theology inherent in it, liturgy as a bearer of the means of grace, and finally, the purpose of liturgy for the world.

3.2.1 "Leitourgia"

Daniel Block, in *For the Glory of God,* refers to "cultic" practices, and says, "I use the term 'cult' according to its classical definition, relating not to fringe religious groups but to legitimate forms and systems of religious worship, especially external rites and ceremonies where homage is given to divine beings."[225] He then offers an exposition of all the words in

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[223] Frank C. Senn, *Embodied Liturgy: Lessons in Christian Ritual* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2016), 19–20.

[224] Keith W. Drury, *The Wonder of Worship: Why We Worship the Way We Do* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2005), 293.

[225] Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 17.

the Bible that can be used to describe worship, including the Greek word, *leitourgia*, upon which today's word "liturgy" is based. It is in the context of cultic worship that the word "liturgy" is used today. Cherry says, "It [liturgy] refers to actions that worshipers undertake in order to do the work of worship. Since all worshipers engage to some degree in the actions of worship, all worshipers engage in liturgy."[226] The phrase "the work of worship" is indicative of Cherry's understanding of the origins of the word "liturgy," to which I now turn.

There are two streams of thought in liturgical studies regarding the definition of the word "liturgy," derived from the Greek word *leitourgia*. Before describing the two positions it will be helpful to discover the source of the word and its etymology. In an article titled "*Leitourgia* and Related Terms," Naphtali Lewis, an ancient papyri scholar, explains the etymology of the word. He says, "In short, it was the established view in antiquity that the words of the *leitourgia* group were compounded of the elements 'public' + 'work', to signify 'work for the people,' hence 'service to the state.'"[227] The word was originally used to describe compulsory public service by wealthy citizens of Greece, consisting in paying for public festivals, equipping shipping fleets, and, Lewis says, "less expensive – were a number of other functions, mainly in connection with religious ceremonies."[228] Significantly, all of these "public services" involved providing funding to fulfill a political duty or expectation based on the person's rank in society. From this usage as a political and financial term, over time it was broadened to mean any service to the community. By the end of the fifth century BCE, it became even more generalized, designating "a service of any kind, for any beneficiary, not necessarily for the benefit of the community."[229] This definition diverged into two specialized meanings in the fourth century BCE, one relating to a specific type of military service, and the other as "cultic service to divinity. This meaning…was carried through the Septuagint into Christian usage, where it still remains today."[230] The word has a meaning in general usage that refers to the texts and/or prescribed practices of worship. Even in books about liturgy, the meaning of the word is often taken for granted. For example, Juliette Day in *Reading the Liturgy*,[231] and Paul Bradshaw in *The Search for the Origins of*

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[226] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 50.

[227] Naphtali Lewis, "*'Leitourgia'* and Related Terms," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 3, no. 4 (1960): 177, https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/leitourgia-related-terms/docview/1301497272/se-2?accountid=8155.

[228] Ibid., 181.

[229] Ibid.

[230] Ibid., 181–82.

[231] Juliette Day and Benjamin Gordon-Taylor, eds., *The Study of Liturgy and Worship: An Alcuin guide* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2013b).

Christian Worship[232] both use the word *liturgical* in the first few paragraphs with no explanation of what meaning(s) they attach to the word. Even the *New Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*[233] has no definition of the word "liturgy." In liturgical studies, however, there is a conversation about the definition, based on the etymology presented above.

The work of the people

On one side of the discussion are those who understand the word to literally mean "the work of the people," which is how Cherry understands it. She says, "Liturgy isn't just the order of service; it is everything we do to offer our body, soul, mind, and strength to minister to God as a gathered community—*it is the people's work.*"[234] This definition is in agreement with Cherry's definition of corporate worship as "acts of corporate devotion" by a body of believers. It derives from the simplest breakdown of the original word: work + people. For Cherry and others like her, this view emphasizes the participation of the entire congregation in the acts of worship; that liturgy signifies actions taken by human beings in order to worship God.

Geoffrey Wainwright, in his introduction, evidently understands that this is not the only possibility, but he would like to "allow for" this etymology of *leitourgia*, because "…it hints at the focal place and function which I ascribe to worship in the Christian life as a whole. Into the liturgy the people bring their entire existence so that it may be gathered up in praise."[235] Again, this is related to Cherry's "acts of corporate devotion." The "work of the people" is, in this view, their "living sacrifice" offered to God. The liturgy of the church provides the means to make the offering. Schmit also refers to the same translation of the term. He says, "If liturgy is 'the work of the people,' then it is not something performed solely by ordained priests for the sake of gathered worshipers."[236] Schmit describes the "work of the people" in a similar vein to Cherry and Wainwright, as participation in the practices of the church in order to worship God. In addition, he points to a common basis for adopting this translation—that the liturgy is something that is meant for the participation of the whole church, and not just

[232] Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[233] Paul F. Bradshaw, *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship* (London: SCM Press, 2013, 2005).

[234] Cherry, *The Music Architect*, 22; emphasis in original.

[235] Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine and Life: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, 1980), 8.

[236] Schmit, "Worship as a Locus for Transformation," 30.

for priests. It is a correction to the idea that whatever happens in a corporate worship service is limited to the action of the leader(s). This is sometimes a criticism aimed at "liturgical" churches, especially the Roman Catholic church. The same mindset, however, can be found in evangelical Protestant churches when everything that is done in a worship service is led by the pastors and/or music leaders without any expectation of participation by the congregation except to watch the "show." Cherry addresses this problem in *The Worship Architect* in a chapter devoted to providing opportunities for the congregation to actively participate in the liturgy.[237] All of these authors conceive of the liturgy as a means for the gathered community of believers to address themselves to God.

Work done on behalf of the people

Lizette Larson-Miller ascribes the broad adoption of the previously-discussed translation to the "excitement of the ecumenical liturgical renewal (the second half of the twentieth century)." As seen in Cherry, Wainwright, and Schmit, the strength of this understanding is that it sees "liturgical action as something that everyone present [does] together, not just the clergy for the laity."[238] Larson-Miller, however, subscribes to a different understanding of the word. Based on newer scholarship and a "more correct etymology," she presents the view that "liturgy" should be translated as work "done *on behalf* of the people."[239] This translation can also be seen in Lewis's article. With the more recent correction, she says that we are reminded that "liturgy is not simply something we are doing but the space in which God acts on us also. Indeed, that pattern restores the biblical and theological pattern of all Christian living: God initiates and we respond."[240] Further, she says that the more accurate translation stresses action done on behalf of others, not in the sense of "a clerical act done on behalf of the gathered lay community, …[but] as a directive that all the baptized should offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for the sake of the world."[241] In this view, it is important to recognize the actions of God in worship, or God's work on behalf of the people, as well as the actions of the worshipers on behalf of the world. Cherry hints at this idea in her definition

[237] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 290–301.
[238] Lizette Larson-Miller, "Sanctification and Worship," in Williams and Mark A. Lamport, *Theological Foundations of Worship*, 171.
[239] Ibid.
[240] Ibid., 174.
[241] Ibid., 177–78.

when she describes corporate worship as a meeting between God and his people, but does not elaborate on what that meeting entails as far as who is "working" in her definition.

Senn understands the word to include both sides of the coin. He says, "Liturgy includes worship, which is the service we render to God, but liturgy is more than worship understood in that way. It includes the service that God renders to his people through designated ministers in the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments (the divine liturgy).[242] This view is narrower than Larson-Miller's in the application of what "on behalf of the people" signifies, as it is focused only on what is happening within the church. Larson-Miller's focus is on the church's response to God's actions on their behalf, and also on the church's ministry on behalf the world.

While these authors do not agree on the translation of the word "liturgy," they all see the liturgy as providing opportunities for a dialogical relationship between God and the church, in which God speaks and worshipers respond. Both Cherry and Wainwright express agreement with Larson-Miller regarding the relationship between God and the people in worship. Larson-Miller says, "God initiates, we respond, and in ritual worship of God via liturgy, that response continues as a dialogue between our worship, our glorification of God, and God's response in sanctification, transforming us as the church."[243] One of Cherry's foundational tenets is that "Worship is patterned in revelation and response." Corporate worship for Cherry is a "conversation" initiated by God, and an expression of the relationship between the God who initiates and the worshipers who respond to him.[244] Wainwright also emphasizes the idea that worship is initiated by the God who is in relationship with his people. He says, "The character of Christian worship is that of an encounter in which God speaks to us and gives us the tokens of his love, and in which we offer him our praise and thanks, seek his forgiveness and renew our commitment, ask his help and entrust our future to him."[245] This shared understanding of the dynamic of revelation and response between God and the people in worship indicates that, despite the disparity in their understandings of the word, these authors have at least part of the understanding in common. What is lacking in the first group of authors is a clearly articulated view that the worship of believers is "for the sake of the world." Don Saliers addresses this idea in his book *Worship as Theology.* In his

[242] Senn, *Embodied Liturgy*, 19.
[243] Larson-Miller, "Sanctification and Worship," 174.
[244] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 19.
[245] Wainwright, *Doxology*, 443.

book, he develops the idea of the liturgy being the "ongoing prayer and word of Jesus Christ—and the ongoing self-giving of God in and through Christ's body in the world made alive by the Spirit."[246] Saliers's observation about the liturgy is similar to both Hancock's and Greggs's views on the church participating in the high priestly office of Christ for the world, which is indirectly referenced in Cherry's definition in the first point, with her emphasis on meeting with the *triune* God.

Biblical usage

Block describes in more detail how *leitourgia* is used in the Bible. "The most explicit New Testament expression for cultic and ritual service rendered to God is *leitourgeō*, which underlies the English word 'liturgy.' In the New Testament this word group sometimes refers to general service, but cognate nouns are also used of…priestly service."[247] In the Old Testament, he says the Hebrew word usually translated in the Septuagint as *leitourgia* is the Hebrew *šērēt*, which means to minister or to serve. It is translated as *leitourgia* when the word refers to cultic matters.[248] Although the word is occasionally used in the New Testament for other types of service, Block emphasizes its use for instances relating to priestly service.

An interesting biblical usage of *leitourgia* occurs in Acts 13:2. The NIV translates the verse as "While they were *worshiping* the Lord and fasting…" This is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used in reference to what we might recognize as the gathered worship of believers.[249] Williams says, "The word translated **worshipping** is that usually employed in the LXX for the service of priests and Levites in the temple (Gk. *leitourgein*; cf. our 'liturgy')"[250] In this case, however, the passage seems to refer to the worship of the whole church, according to Williams, who continues, "The subject **they** will have particular reference to the prophets and teachers, but should not be confined to them, for the whole church will have been involved in both the worship and the decision that was taken at this time (cf. 1:15; 6:2, 5; 14:22; 15:22)."[251] The passage doesn't say exactly what they were

[246] Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 27.
[247] Block, *For the Glory of God*, 22.
[248] Ibid., (footnote 82).
[249] Blue Letter Bible, "G3008 - leitourgeo - Strong's Greek Lexicon (kjv)," last modified October 12, 2022, accessed October 12, 2022, https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3008/kjv/mgnt/0-1/.
[250] David J. Williams, *Acts*, New International biblical commentary series 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995), 221; emphasis in original.
[251] Ibid., 221–22; emphasis in original.

doing to worship the Lord, other than fasting, which is mentioned separately. The result was that "…the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:2-3). This short introduction to Paul's first missionary journey gives a glimpse into the earliest corporate worship practices of the New Testament church. Joining together in worship practices described as "liturgy," this passage speaks to the expectation that the gathered church would be addressed by God, and that participation in the liturgy includes being sent into the world as representatives of Christ.

An important part of the discussion to this point of the word "liturgy" has been its usage in facilitating the expression of the relationship between God and his people in worship. James Torrance elaborates on the ideas seen in Hancock, Greggs and Saliers regarding the worshiper's relationship to the Trinity and to Christ as high priest, saying,

> Christian worship is, therefore, our participation through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father, in his vicarious life of worship and intercession. It is our response to our Father for all that he has done for us in Christ. It is our self-offering in body, mind and spirit, in response to the one true offering made for us in Christ, our response of gratitude (*eucharistia*) to God's grace (*charis*), our sharing by grace in the heavenly intercession of Christ.[252]

In this definition, Torrance emphasizes the primacy of Christ in worship, as the high priest and the door, as it were, to communion with the Father through the Spirit. He echoes ideas found in the section on corporate worship: first from Hancock, who writes of the "engrafting" of believers into the communal life of the Trinity through Christ's sacrifice, and second from Greggs, who posits that the outworking of this relationship is believers' orientation towards the world that God loves. Torrance points to the role of Jesus in worship to "stand in for us" and to "offer to the Father the worship and the praise we failed to offer." The result of our response to Christ's action on our behalf is that "in him and through him we are renewed by the Spirit in the image of God."[253] This picture of participating with Christ in our worship addresses the priestly role of Christ in the church's worship as both presenting our offering on our behalf and being present with us in our worship (cf. Hebrews 2:10). The references to priestly service in the book of Hebrews are the primary way in which *leiturgia* is used in the New Testament. The liturgy employed in corporate worship enables worshipers to respond to

[252] Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace*, 15.
[253] Ibid., 14.

God's grace by offering our thanks through Christ as our perfect high priest and by sharing in his priestly office on behalf of world.

The term "Liturgy" contains much more than the simple idea of being the order of service. Its historical understandings as a form of service or work both by people and on behalf of people has resulted in various ways of conceiving it. It conveys meanings about the dialogue between God and his people in worship, which include God's work on behalf of the church and the world, to which the church responds by glorifying God with thankfulness, representing the people's work. Liturgy also expresses how the church participates in the work of Christ as high priest, as they offer their worship on behalf of the world. In the following section, the functions of liturgy will be presented.

3.2.2 The functions of liturgy

The following three sections will describe the functions of liturgy, in which Wesley's theological understanding will be brought into the conversation. The three functions include how liturgy relates to the church's normative and espoused theology and the worshipers' operant theology, its function as a source of the means of grace, and its purpose for the sake of the world.

3.2.2.1 Liturgy and Theology

A discussion of the manner in which Wesley expected corporate worship to be transformational begins with a question that involves liturgy and theology. Does our *a priori* theology inform the liturgy used in our corporate worship, or does our experience of engaging with liturgy inform our theology? In Wesleyan terms, which takes precedence—tradition or experience? Central to this discussion is the phrase, *"Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi,"* which Wainwright calls "A Latin tag in modern use."[254] Wainwright's identification of it as a "tag" hints at the reality that the phrase is a truncation of a longer phrase, "*legem credenda lex statuat suppliandi"* that was taken from a letter by the lay monk, Prosper of Aquitane, written between 435 and 442.[255] The original letter had only a fine thread, as it were, connecting its content to liturgy. Johnson explains that the original letter addressed semi-Pelagian theological issues at that time, and that this particular phrase was truncated and used

[254] Wainwright, *Doxology*, 218.
[255] Ibid., 225.

in the discussion of the interplay between prayer and belief by writers of a much later time.[256] Thus, *"Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi"* has developed into something quite different than the source upon which it is based.

Larson-Miller calls the phrase a "bumper-sticker" summary of much liturgical theology, and that it is "usually interpreted to mean 'the law of faith [equals] the law of prayer,' or 'we pray what we believe and believe what we pray.'"[257] In Wainwright's explanation of the phrase, he also proposes that it can be understood in two ways, and he describes the tendencies of its use. He says, "The more usual way makes the rule of prayer a norm for belief; what is prayed indicates what may and must be believed."[258] This reading of the phrase, according to Wainwright, is predominant in the Roman Catholic Church, in which "Catholics have appealed to past and present liturgical practice in order to justify doctrinal positions and developments."[259] However, because of the linguistic ambiguity of Latin, Wainwright points out that, grammatically, it is "equally possible to reverse subject and predicate and so take the tag as meaning that the rule of faith is the norm for prayer: what must be believed governs what may and should be prayed." This, he says, is the primary way the phrase is used in Protestant discussions, saying, "…it was the policy of the Reformers to establish doctrinal control over worship, and the critical primacy of doctrine in relation to liturgy has remained characteristic of Protestantism."[260] His final comment on the ambiguity of the phrase is that it "corresponds to a material interplay which in fact takes place between worship and doctrine in Christian practice: worship influences doctrine, and doctrine worship."[261] Wainwright and Larson-Miller thus both avoid the either/or application of the phrase. Larson-Miller signifies her position on the subject by saying theology and worship "are intimately related in a circular (or spiraling) way, always mutually influencing each other."[262] Since, as Wainwright points out, the Latin grammatical construction is ambiguous, this understanding of the phrase is helpful.

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[256] For an in-depth discussion of the origin and historical development of the usage of this phrase, see Chapter 1 of Johnson. Maxwell E. Johnson, *Praying and Believing in Early Christianity: The Interplay Between Christian Worship and Doctrine* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013).

[257] Larson-Miller, "Sanctification and Worship," 173.

[258] Wainwright, *Doxology*, 218.

[259] Ibid.

[260] Ibid., 219.

[261] Ibid.

[262] Larson-Miller, "Sanctification and Worship," 173.

Cherry uses the phrase in a way that more closely resembles, but does not exactly correspond to what Wainwright identified as the Catholic norm. Applying it to what happens in evangelical churches, she says,

> Essentially, the proposition is this: what we pray becomes what we believe (in the context of worship). The idea is that all corporate worship is prayer and that the words that we use to pray ultimately shape what we believe. The songs we are given to sing shape what we believe. The creeds, the passages of Scripture that the community hears, the baptismal and Communion liturgies—all of it forms us.[263]

Differentiating herself from the Roman Catholic view, rather than saying the rule of prayer is the norm for faith, Cherry says that what we pray *becomes* what we believe[264] In the case of the evangelical church, with no prescribed liturgy, it is possible that what is communicated by the liturgy is not in line with the normative theology of the church. Whatever is presented to the worshipers by the leadership of the local church represents that church's espoused theology, but not necessarily the normative theology of the denomination. In essence, Cherry is saying that the liturgy becomes the espoused theology of the local church, affecting what the worshipers believe, resulting in their operant theology. Because the "*Lex Orandi, Lex Credendi*" phrase is ambiguous, it expresses both ideas; that the ideas expressed in the liturgy are indicative of the normative theology of the church—that the worshipers speak that theology, but also that whatever words are put into the mouths of the worshipers shape what they believe, whether it is the normative theology of the church, or something else.

For John Wesley, the Anglican liturgy of his time was the beginning point for his theological understanding of corporate worship, but it was not the final word for him. Westerfield Tucker points to eighteenth-century England being a time of "ressourcement" in the church. She says that, although the word "ressourcement" refers to a movement in the twentieth century in which theologians and liturgical scholars "advocated for a 'return to the sources,"'[265] the term can also be applied to seventeenth and eighteenth century England, "as various factions related to the national church mined historic documents (especially those of Christian antiquity) not only to invigorate the worship of their day by introducing (or reintroducing) older practices, but also to find a possible liturgical middle ground in which all might in good

[263] Cherry, *The Music Architect*, 238.
[264] Cameron, *Talking about God in Practice*, 57.
[265] Westerfield Tucker, "Wesley's Emphases on Worship and the Means of Grace," 227.

conscience participate."[266] Wesley was a good example of this movement. He proposed changes to the *Book of Common Prayer* in use at the time. He based his proposals on several sources, including the first *Book of Common Prayer* from 1549, his wide reading of ancient documents, and various secondary resources. He was unsuccessful, along with others who proposed changes, and the 1661/1662 prayer book of the church remained in use.[267]

Since his proposed revisions to the official *Book of Common Prayer* were not adopted, Wesley produced his own edited version of it in 1784 for the Methodists in North America. Westerfield Tucker says,

> Wesley engaged more in excision than addition, removing entire sections, deleting problematic sentences, eliminating redundancies, substituting words. …Surprisingly, given his idealization of early Christian practices, Wesley…did not insert new material taken from the apostolic period, such as an epiclesis in the communion rite. Yet, he regarded the final product—considerably reduced from the original—to be consistent with the norms of scripture and primitive practice.[268]

Wesley relied on his normal mode of theological analysis to produce what he deemed useful and profitable for the Methodists—Scripture and "primitive practice," which, in this case, was his appeal to tradition. He went so far as to advise the North American Methodists that, although he believed his revised Prayer Book was the finest liturgical expression in the world of a "solid, scriptural, rational piety," that "should they find his revision wanting they were at liberty to use the standards he himself had employed—Scripture and the primitive church—to create some other."[269] Wesley understood that the liturgy found in the Prayer Book would be put into practice in the churches under his care, and that the participants would learn and be shaped by the theology and doctrines found in that liturgy. Thus, in this instance, he demonstrated his belief that doctrine should inform liturgy. At the same time, he left room for the Methodists who would be worshiping in an entirely different context to make changes according to that experience, as long as it followed the standards of Scripture and tradition.

3.2.2.2 Liturgy and the means of grace

As discussed in the previous chapter, Wesley understood the means of grace to be the normative channels by which the Holy Spirit administers sanctifying grace. Knight provided

[266] Ibid.
[267] Ibid., 227–28.
[268] Ibid., 234–35.
[269] Ibid., 235.

insight into two basic functions of Wesley's means—those that communicate the *presence* of God, and those that communicate the *identity* of God. According to Knight, it is important to participate in both types in order to avoid an unbalanced understanding of God. This balanced view can be seen to relate to a balanced view of Scripture and experience in Wesley's theology.

In the liturgy of the church, then, both types of the means of grace are important. Of the means of grace found in the context of corporate worship, Knight lists "scripture, preaching, the eucharist, and the prayers of the tradition" as those that communicate the identity of God, and "participation in Christian community and extemporaneous prayer" as those that communicate the presence of God. "Participation in Christian community" can include not only the practices included in corporate worship, but the interaction and conversations with the community of believers who gather together to worship God. As discussed in the previous chapter, these categories are not exclusive, and some of the means may communicate both presence and identity.

While these specific means of grace were listed by Wesley, he understood that his lists were not inclusive of all means of grace for all time. Knight says, "The instituted means belong to the universal church in all eras of history and in all cultures. In contrast, the prudential means of grace vary from age to age, culture to culture, and person to person; they reflect God's ability to use any means in addition to those instituted in accordance with different times and circumstances."[270] Following that line of thought, several authors express their ideas regarding what can be thought of as a means of grace. Andrew Root says that "Practice itself becomes a means of grace because practices are the gifts given to humanity that draw the human agent into divine action.[271] Root, along with others such as Cherry, Mann, and Bass/Dykstra, expand the idea of the means of grace to include practices not specifically listed by Wesley. Mann says, "In regard to the question of appropriate means of grace, then, we should take a very pragmatic approach. Any activity, device, or method that enhances our receptivity and responsiveness to the gracious call of God can be a vital means of grace in our pursuit of and growth in holiness."[272] Cherry specifically mentions music, saying, "In the context of Christian worship, music also serves as a means of grace. It is a channel through

[270] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 3.
[271] Root, *Christopraxis*, 70.
[272] Mann, *Perfecting Grace*, 170.

which God speaks to us and works in us for our good. It provides an avenue for God to continue the ongoing process toward Christlikeness in his children."[273] Bass and Dykstra describes how practices in general communicate God's grace:

> Texts and propositions alone cannot carry or communicate the knowledge of God's grace in Christ that is at the heart of Christian existence. This life-giving knowledge, which dwells in the bodies of believers and in the body they comprise, is gained through forms of active and receptive participation that engage a wide range of human capacities. Likewise, the specific practices by which we respond to God's grace—practices such as prayer, forgiveness, and hospitality—bear knowledge of God, ourselves, and the world that cannot be reduced to words, even though words are often indispensable in helping us to learn and participate faithfully in them.[274]

Various communal practices found in corporate worship, then, can be seen as means of grace if they communicate either the identity of God and/or the presence of God, and if they are the "ordinary channels" which God has ordained to "convey grace" to people. In Wesley's written lists, however, the practices that he considered essential parts of the liturgy were found in the list of "instituted means." These are: 1) Public prayer, 2) Searching the scriptures, 3) The Lord's Supper, and 5) Christian conference.[275] These individual means of grace will be discussed in more detail in chapter nine as part of my recommendations for worship practices.

The means of grace, then, which were presented in the previous chapter as essential for the process of sanctification, are an integral part of the liturgy of corporate worship that is a locus for that spiritual transformation. They are the link between the practices of corporate worship and the pursuit of an experience of sanctification.

3.2.2.3 Liturgy for the sake of the world

Transformational corporate worship does not end at the door of the church. The coming together of the Body of Christ to participate in a liturgy that gives them the means to express their relationship to God and to each other has the *telos* of blessing the world. Larson-Miller emphasizes that there is an "integral relationship between the worship of God and the living of Christian life," and that it is an "unbreakable bond." In her understanding of the word

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[273] Cherry, *The Music Architect*, 247.

[274] Bass and Dykstra, *For Life Abundant*, 358.

[275] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 5. In The Wesleyan Church, as in most evangelical churches, fasting and abstinence are not usually practiced corporately. They may be encouraged as personal practices.

"liturgy as being "work done *on behalf* of the people," she directs it outward instead of keeping it within the church. She says, "It is far better to understand this as a directive that all the baptized should offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for the sake of the world and understand the multiple acts of worship as one continuum."[276] God's intention for his people has always been that they will receive God's blessings in order to be a blessing to others (cf. Genesis 12:2-3). Saliers, in his "initial" definition of liturgy offers these thoughts:

> Think first of the church gathered, as the ongoing prayer and word of Jesus Christ—and the ongoing self-giving of God in and through Christ's body in the world made alive by the Spirit. …Liturgy is doing God's will and work in the world while providing human beings with a time and a place for recalling who God is and who we are before God, and identifying the world to itself—what it is in God's eyes—the pathos of this terrifying and beautiful world."[277]

As participants in the high priestly work of Christ for the world, the church is the physical representation of Christ in the world, and the liturgy is the expression of that ministry.

Greggs addresses this idea in relation to his discussion of sanctification and the worship of the church. In participating in the priestly office of Christ, we are, like Christ, oriented not only vertically towards the Father, but horizontally towards the other, both in the community of the church and to the world. He says,

> Our worship is accepted in the sanctified offering of Christ and thereby takes the form of that offering. It orientates itself towards God and God's will – the God who is *for the world* and *wills the world's salvation.* Even, therefore, in the vertical axis of human existence towards God in praise, worship, thanksgiving, and adoration in the church, there is a corporate and other-orientated form.[278]

Worship does not end at the door of the church, and transformational worship does not merely effect an inward change to a believer's personal life. The purpose of spiritual transformation is to change the hearts of believers, as Larson-Miller says, "for the sake of the world." This outward-facing orientation of the worshiping community is the heart of God's purpose for the church, as reflected in what is commonly called the "Great Commission" in Matthew 28:19-20a— "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey

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[276] Larson-Miller, "Sanctification and Worship," 177–78.
[277] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 27.
[278] Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, 395; emphasis in original.

everything I have commanded you." Spiritual transformation is never intended to simply bless the Body of Christ, but to make the Body of Christ a blessing to the world.

Alvin Dueck addresses the question about the ultimate purpose of transformational worship, connecting the liturgy used in worship to this purpose when he says,

> Worship serves the larger purpose of being a faithful witness in society. It is less about what worship does for me and more about how our character is transformed into the image of God. …The gathering is the context in which to discern how that service in the world is to take place. …In this worship model, liturgy reflects the commitment to individual transformation, to a practical Christianity, and to community life.[279]

Liturgy is not something that affects only those things that occur in the "hallowed halls" of the church. It is a way in which gathered Christians commune with the triune God, receive grace, respond with thankfulness, and become new creations, not for their own sake, but for the sake of the world, to the glory of God.

This section was an overview of the world "liturgy" for the purpose of determining its meaning and functions in the broader discussion of corporate worship and transformation. Liturgy may be conceived as the words and actions that facilitate corporate worship. Four aspects of liturgy were examined in this section.

First, the word "liturgy" has been used since before the Christian church began. In the disagreements over the correct etymology of "liturgy" and its application for corporate worship, it is important to understand the nuances of the current conversation, as this understanding has an influence on what is emphasized in the planning, presentation, and practices of contemporary corporate worship. Both of the arguments for the word are helpful in understanding how liturgy functions in the church. If liturgy is work done *on behalf* of the people, it is a vehicle for God's communication to the church as well as a way for the church to engage in worship for the sake of the world. If it is work done *by* the people, it is a vehicle for participants to respond to the gracious gifts of God. These views can be placed side-by-side to present an understanding of liturgy that addresses various aspects of the practices of corporate worship. Second, was a discussion of the phrase *Lex Orandi, Lex Vivendi*, which describes liturgy's function as both an expression of the normative and espoused theology of the church, and as an influence on the operant theology of the participants. The third

[279] Alvin Dueck, "Worship as Transformed Lives," in Abernethy, *Worship that Changes Lives*, 238.

subsection connected the practices included in the liturgy to the means of grace and their place in the process of sanctification. The fourth part presented the ultimate *telos* of liturgy, which is to facilitate the "other-orientedness" of the worship of the church.

3.3 Conclusion

This chapter began by situating corporate worship in the broader subject of worship in general. A definition of corporate worship from Constance Cherry was offered as a framework for the chapter, outlining three major components. The first component is its corporate nature—It is a corporate meeting of the triune God and believers that is regular and ongoing. Corporate worship is potentially transformational in part because of its "corporateness"—that is, it is a communal activity, both on a human level and a spiritual level. As noted by Greggs, "There is no communion with God without communion with one another, and there is no true communion with one another without communion with God."[280] Participation in acts of worship as a community of believers binds believers together and forms them into the Body of Christ. Hancock says we share in the "inherent relationality" of the Trinity through corporate worship.[281] These ideas support the claim that there are experiences afforded by corporate worship that cannot be had through other forms of worship. The second section of the chapter was about the liturgy of the church. The understanding of the word "liturgy" was discussed, followed by its functions of communicating theology, offering the means of grace, and its ultimate purpose of enabling people to live in the world according to God's purposes. These discussions regarding liturgy relate to both the second and third components of Cherry's definition of corporate worship. The second component of that definition is that it includes practices that give glory to God by bearing witness to the identity of the worshipers as God's children and by proclaiming God's story. The third component is that it is spiritually formational for the worshipers in both personal Christlikeness and living in the world according to God's purposes. The practices mentioned in the second component are expressed by the liturgy of the church. The spiritual formation referenced in the third component is a result of participation in the practices found in the liturgy.

[280] Tom Greggs, *The Breadth of Salvation: Rediscovering the Fullness of God's Saving Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 39.

[281] Hancock, "Corporate Worship," 407.

This chapter's purpose was to concentrate on the connection between the communal practices of corporate worship and a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification as presented in the preceding chapter. By understanding the meaning and functions of liturgy and the practices included in it, the means of grace can be identified as the link between corporate worship and the doctrine of sanctification. Through purposeful participation in the means of grace, the "holy persons" who have been transformed into "a Holy People"[282] will then be equipped to participate fully as a community of faith for the sake of the world. Wesley's vision of a holy people, transformed by an encounter with the power of the Holy Spirit does not end with a community of believers worshiping God together in a building. The *telos* of holiness is to love the world and serve others. The purpose of transformational corporate worship, then, is to glorify God together with one voice as the sanctified church for the sake of the world.

[282] Ibid., 408.

4 Methodology

As a researcher in the field of practical theology, this project is a study of the relationship between the practice of corporate worship and the doctrine of sanctification as found in The Wesleyan Church.[283] I will combine research into extant literature (including documents from the church) and stories of lived experience of members of the Wesleyan church. This will be a qualitative, phenomenological research project, for which I have chosen to use one-on-one interviews to acquire the stories of experience needed. My framework for reporting on the data revealed by the interviews will be based on Richard Osmer's four "core tasks of practical theology," which I will use as the basis for chapters five through nine.[284] These four tasks will be explained in those chapters. This chapter will describe both my methodology in regard to analysis and application of theology as well as the methodology that will be used in collecting and analyzing information from interviews. Both of these pursuits play important roles in the field of practical theology.

4.1 Phenomenology: How can we examine human experience for meaning?

It is not a simple thing to research human experience and come to an understanding of how the other person conceives of their experience. It is even more difficult when the experience in question is spiritual in nature and quite subjective in interpretation, both from the perspective of the person who had the experience, and from the perspective of the researcher. Since I am looking for stories of personal experience of a spiritual event, the field of phenomenology will serve as the basis for this project. First, I will examine a Husserlian approach to phenomenological research, followed by Heidegger's proposition of approaching phenomenology from a hermeneutical standpoint, as well as Gadamer's thoughts on how a hermeneutical process can produce a fusion of horizons between the researcher and the research participant. Although these three philosophical approaches will be presented as separate items, my intention is to examine the points made by each of them that will be helpful in coming to an understanding of the spiritual experiences that will be reported by my research participants. Following a short overview of the three philosophers' salient ideas, I will turn to the implications for the design of this research project.

[283] Cameron, *Talking about God in Practice*, 57.
[284] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

4.1.1 Husserl – "To the thing itself."

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is known as the founder of the field of phenomenology. He was not content with the epistemological manner of research that was the only form of scientific research considered valid in his time. But, as a mathematician, he developed a scientifically rigorous research method in order to find the "essence" of things. Husserl posited that to see "the thing" correctly—in the case of this study, the experience of the participant—the researcher should do two things. First, the researcher must reduce the phenomenon to its "essential Being," which is termed the "transcendental reduction." He said, "All transcendentally purified 'experiences' are non-realities, and excluded from every connection within the 'real world.'"[285] This idea of things being part of the world or not part of the world is a difficult concept. According to Dorion Cairns, this is an exercise in which the researcher first identifies those things that must philosophically remain "part of the world," which cannot be excluded, and those things which can be regarded as observable, or "outside" of the world of the researcher. He says,

> My *body* is obviously part of the world, in world-time and -space, in the causal nexus of world-reality. It is part of the world-phenomenon, and so are the *determinations* of my mind as in world-space, -time, and -causality.
>
> But my mental processes—my believing, doubting, denying, perceiving, judging, remembering, expecting, liking, disliking, loving, hating, wishing, willing—are "abstractable" from these their world-determinations.[286]

The researcher's task is then to "bracket" or set aside any of the "abstractable" ideas they might have about the subject. This process of bracketing is known as *epoché.* Husserl says,

> The whole world as placed within the nature-setting and presented in experience as real, taken completely "free from all theory," just as it is in reality experienced, and made clearly manifest in and through the linkings of our experiences, has now no validity for us, it must be set in brackets, untested indeed but also uncontested. Similarly all theories and sciences, positivistic or otherwise, which relate to this world, however good they may be, succumb to the same fate.[287]

Husserl believed that one could set aside one's own experience; in fact, he very strongly stated that in order to come to a true understanding of a "thing" or a phenomenon, we must

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[285] Edmund Husserl and William R. B. Gibson, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Muirhead library of philosophy (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 111.

[286] Dorion Cairns, *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*, trans. Embree, Lester E., ed., Phaenomenologica V. 207 (Dordrecht, London: Springer, 2012), 8, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-5043-2.

[287] Husserl and Gibson, *Ideas*, 54.

"put in brackets" our preconceived understanding of the world as it relates to the phenomenon before we can truly understand it without bias. Cairns describes this as a multi-step process of discerning the essence of a phenomenon. It is not accomplished all at once; instead, it is achieved by repeating the process until a "pure" understanding without bias is reached.[288]

While this is a noble ideal, many phenomenologists after Husserl do not think that complete bracketing of prior understanding is possible or necessary. Van Manen says, "The epoché is the critical phenomenological device that should defeat bias that occurs from unexamined assumptions, personal or systematic prejudices, closed-mindedness, and so on. But it should be acknowledged as well that all understanding presumes preunderstandings."[289] Our own life-world is necessarily filled with preunderstandings. Otherwise, we could not function. As we learn new things, they are connected to things we already know. Sometimes our preunderstandings must be adjusted or corrected, but it is impossible to observe a phenomenon without attaching some preunderstanding to it, even in the process of observing it.

Jean-Luc Marion presented a paper titled "Phenomenality and Revelation" in a webinar hosted by the University of Cambridge on March 5, 2021. In that webinar, he said, "A phenomenon is a self-displaying event," meaning, that when we are confronted with a phenomenon, we need to first accept it as it appears to us, without attempting to understand or interpret it. Marion said we need to see it and take time to describe it, as it presents itself to us. How we perceive and describe the phenomenon will necessarily be interpreted by our own "life-world," or the sum of our experiences and situatedness in the world. It is only after describing it as we see it, that we can then search for understanding. For this project, the way the phenomenon is perceived by the research participant will involve that person's experiences and pre-understanding, and will thus be the way in which they recount it to the researcher. Their recounting of the phenomenon will then be received by me, the researcher, who will receive it with different life experiences and understandings. The task, then, is to report and analyze the phenomena experienced by the research participants as faithfully as possible. We turn next to Heidegger for further ideas.

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[288] Cairns, *The Philosophy of Edmund Husserl*, 14–16.

[289] Max van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice: Developing Qualitative Inquiry* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 353.

4.1.2 Heidegger – Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), was also an important phenomenological thinker of the 20th century. He, however, rejected Husserl's idea of the *epoché*. While Husserl had an epistemological idea of phenomenology (how we know things), Heidegger's focus was on ontology. He said, "phenomenology is the science of the Being of entities—ontology."[290] McConnell-Henry *et al*. explain it this way: "Heidegger saw himself as an ontologist, as demonstrated by his desire to uncover and unravel the meaning of being. However, having said that, Heidegger deemed that there was no discernable difference between epistemology and ontology. For him, knowing only came through interpretation and understanding."[291] Heidegger used the word *Dasein* to indicate the human's Being. The *Dasein* is situated in a world. There are different attitudes about and involvements with the world, but the *Dasein* cannot be separated from its own world. Therefore, to attempt to strip away preunderstandings from the *Dasein*, as Husserl recommended, if it were possible, would strip away part of the Being itself. Therefore, a human is a "Being-in-the-world."

Heidegger asserted that the very nature of phenomenology rests in interpretation, which is what hermeneutics is meant to accomplish. When *Dasein* is confronted with a new thing, its very nature is to interpret the event. Heidegger says it "projects its Being upon possibilities" in order to interpret the event. He says, "Whenever something is interpreted as something, the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us."[292] Thus, the preunderstandings held by a "Being-in-the-world" are essential to interpretation that leads to further understanding. This is the hermeneutic circle, in which new events encountered by a Being-in-the-world are interpreted by the previous understandings, and, in the process, previous understandings are open for adjustment and correction in light of new experiences.

This hermeneutical process of understanding phenomena, as van Manen says, cannot be reduced to procedures or a "series of steps that would lead to insightful phenomenological studies."[293] While there may not be tried and true procedures, there are methodological bases

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[290] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 64th ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 61.

[291] Tracy McConnell-Henry, "Husserl and Heidegger: Exploring the Disparity," *International Journal of Nursing Practice* 15 (2009): 10, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/1440172x/2009/15/1.

[292] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 191.

[293] van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice*, 30.

for conducting phenomenological research. We turn now to Gadamer, whose project of using hermeneutics to support human understanding will form the basis for the method of phenomenological research I will use, and will be a key to help unlock the door to a sympathetic interpretation of the phenomena of spiritually transforming experiences.

4.1.3 Gadamer – Hermeneutic phenomenology and horizons of meaning

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), expanded on the ideas of Husserl and Heidegger in the field of philosophical hermeneutics. Regan says, "In suggesting understanding *was* interpretation and vice versa, Gadamer identifies language acting as the medium for understanding and a means of sharing the complexities of human experience."[294] Because shared understanding comes through language, Gadamer says that every dialogue and search for understanding is necessarily undertaken with prejudices, since our own Being-in-the-world is expressed and understood through language. He says, "The simultaneous building up of our own world in language still persists whenever we want to say something to each other. The result is the actual relationship of men to each other. Each one is at first a kind of linguistic circle, and these linguistic circles come into contact with each other, merging more and more."[295] One idea central to Gadamer's project of hermeneutics is that of "horizons," which is a description of the ideas and thoughts, or preunderstandings of an individual person. When the horizons of two people merge, their understanding of each other increases. Gadamer's interpretation of hermeneutics becomes more of a blending of ideas rather than comparing ideas and choosing the parts with which one agrees. The understanding of each person in a conversation is not so easily separated and examined, as it is constantly changing as a result of their horizons coming into contact with each other.

Gadamer's hermeneutical process of understanding is accomplished through dialogue, in which the world as understood through the language of one person is expressed to another person, whose own understanding of the world is also mediated by language. Thus, in a phenomenological study involving an interviewer and their research partner-participant, the interviewer's questions and comments will be shaped by their own experiences, pre-understandings, and prejudices. The respondent's answers will, in the same way, be shaped

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[294] Paul Regan, "Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics: Concepts of Reading, Understanding and Interpretation," *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy* IV, no. 2 (2012): 286, https://www.metajournal.org//articles_pdf/286-303-regan-meta8-tehno.pdf.

[295] Hans-Georg Gadamer and David E. Linge, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 30th ed. (Berkeley, CA, London: University of California Press, 2008), 17.

by their own experiences, preunderstandings, and prejudices. It is by dialogue between the two people that the "linguistic circles come into contact with each other."[296] In this process of dialogue, the preunderstandings of both partners may interfere with a clear understanding of each other when these two circles come into contact. It is therefore important for the researcher to ask and invite follow-up questions in order for a deeper level of mutual understanding to occur. In the end, the goal is for both participants to experience some modification in their understanding of each other. Without that modification, it is not a dialogue, but merely two people engaging in monologues.

The prejudices that are held by every human being, according to Gadamer, are "not necessarily unjustified and erroneous."[297] He asserts that we can only be open to new ideas if we can compare them to old ideas. In the process of comparing the new to the old, new understandings may be reached. Understanding can never be static—new experiences will always have an effect on previous knowledge. Gadamer says,

> Only through hermeneutical reflection am I no longer unfree over against myself but rather can deem freely what in my preunderstanding may be justified and what unjustifiable. …But this implies, too, that the prejudgments that lead my preunderstanding are also constantly at stake, right up to the moment of their surrender—which surrender could also be called a transformation. It is the untiring power of *experience*, that in the process of being instructed, man is ceaselessly forming a new preunderstanding.[298]

Hermeneutical reflection is an internal process, or exercise, in which one first recognizes their own preunderstandings. These preunderstandings may be identified by personal contemplation prior to a dialogue with another person, but they might only be identified when they are confronted with a new understanding. At that point, a judgment must be made regarding the value of the preunderstanding in relation to the understanding of the other person. Some questions that can be considered are: How will that person's understanding affect my preunderstanding? Is my preunderstanding still valid? How is it challenged by the understanding of the dialogue partner? On what prejudgments is it based? What aspects of my preunderstanding or my basic prejudgments must be surrendered in light of the understanding of the other person? The goal of phenomenological enquiry by using a Gadamerian approach is mutual understanding. Dialogue and hermeneutical reflection are the

[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid., 9.
[298] Ibid., 38; emphasis in original.

key to understanding resulting from the fusion of horizons between the researcher and the research participant.

4.2 Bases for research design

This project has several foci, including a foundation of understanding the bases for Wesleyan theology, and a specific understanding of the Wesleyan doctrines of sanctification and the means of grace. While a specifically Wesleyan doctrine of worship is not clearly defined in the literature, worship will also be examined in connection with sanctification and the means of grace. While all of these foci can be accomplished in a literature review, the final focus of lived experience among Wesleyans is the piece that supplies information that cannot be found in the literature. Prior to interacting with my research participants, I have used the hermeneutical process of understanding to first examine my preunderstandings, which will have been affected by my personal history as well as my interaction with the literature. I have then applied hermeneutical practices to research the phenomenon of spiritual transformation, first in setting up my research procedures. These principles will then be used in the collection of interview data and the analysis of that data on its own and in relation to the literature, and finally, in bringing the interview data and the literature into conversation.

4.2.1 Research Design

To elicit understanding of how my participants perceived their experiences, I am using a qualitative research framework that is constructivist at its core, with the added dimension of phenomenology. Constructivism in this context, according to Sharan Merriam and Elizabeth Tisdell, refers to how people construct their perceptions of the world based on their experiences. Merriam and Tisdell write that qualitative researchers are interested in "1) how people interpret their experiences, 2) how they construct their worlds, and 3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences."[299] The goal is understanding of people's lives and experiences from their own stories. The added phenomenological dimension "seeks understanding about the essence and the underlying structure of the phenomenon."[300] The phenomenon I am seeking to understand is spiritual transformation as experienced by a group of people in The Wesleyan Church. The subject of an internal, spiritual experience is impossible to quantify, thus a qualitative research method is needed. The phenomenological

[299] Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, The Jossey-Bass higher and adult education series (San Francisco CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 23.
[300] Ibid.

approach, according to Merriam and Tisdell is "well suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences."[301] These types of experiences are precisely what I am seeking. While it is possible to observe the physical context and human actions surrounding a spiritual experience, it is not possible to know what the person experienced inwardly—their motivations, their thoughts, or their feelings regarding what happened to them without asking them. For this reason, I chose one-on-one interviews for the process of collecting data. Merriam and Tisdell suggest that "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate.[302] All of these considerations are true for this study. The type of interviews that were most appropriate for eliciting the participants' perspectives without undue influence from me was a semi-structured style of interview, which mixes more structured with less structured questions, using flexibly in order to explore the subject in response to the participants' answers. While there may be some specific data to be collected from the participant during the interview, this style of interviewing is more like a conversation guided by open-ended questions.

In preparation for devising the list of possible interview questions I would pose to my participants, it was necessary for me to identify my own preunderstandings related to the subjects I would ask about in my interviews. My personal story regarding corporate worship and spiritual transformation necessarily plays a significant part in this project, and will be considered when conducting and analyzing interviews. Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann say,

> The interview is an inter-subjective enterprise of two persons talking about common themes of interest. The interviewer does not merely collect statements like gathering small stones on a beach. His or her questions lead up to what aspects of a topic the subject will address, and the interviewer's active listening and following up on the answers co-determines the course of the conversation.[303]

In this way, according to Kvale and Brinkmann, the interviews are "co-authored" by the researcher and the interviewee.[304] As the researcher, I chose the topic of my research, and I chose the questions to pose to my participants, based on my preunderstandings and the

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[301] Ibid., 28.
[302] Ibid., 108.
[303] Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA, London.: Sage Publications, 2009), 192–93.
[304] Ibid.

adjustments made to those understandings as a result of my interaction with the literature. The resulting conversations, then, will be a dialogue between my questions, their responses, and follow-up question and responses from both parties. In the process, I hope to come to some understanding of the participants' experiences regarding the subjects at hand. While the interviews will represent both of our understandings, they will necessarily be somewhat one-sided in the collection phase, as they will include more information from the participants than from me, and I do not intend to influence my participants to adjust their pre-understandings based on my questions. However, my choice of language and emphasis on certain subjects will necessarily affect what they share in response. Beginning with the process of data collection and continuing with analysis of the data, the idea of a hermeneutical spiral will be used, in which questions and answers produce more questions and answers, moving towards a deeper understanding of the intentions of the participants.

4.2.2 Preunderstanding related to interviews

My history will have some similarities to many of my participants' stories. I have lived my entire life in holiness churches, and I have been deeply involved in corporate worship, both as a congregant and as a participant in various aspects of worship leadership since I was a very young child. In this context, I grew up with an understanding of certain things that have traditionally been accepted in holiness denominations regarding sanctification, one of which is the expectation of an instantaneous, dramatic experience of transformation. This expectation can be seen as the legacy of Phoebe Palmer and revivalism in the holiness tradition, as discussed in chapter two. However, when I look back over my life, there is no single experience that I can identify as my sanctification "moment." Sanctification for me has been a journey, or a "growth in grace." There were "moments" along the way. So, why did I pursue a research study in this area? Partly, I feel that my experience of corporate worship is a significant piece of my spiritual journey, and I was interested in hearing about the experiences of others coming from the same church background. I was also looking for examples of what I saw in the literature regarding the relationship between corporate worship and sanctification.

My interaction with the literature is also affected by my personal history. As a researcher coming from the Wesleyan tradition, my history of experiences with the subjects included in my literature review has necessarily colored my understanding and interpretations of what has been written. This extends, as well, to my judgment of which literature would be useful to

review for this project. In the end, my initial preunderstandings as well as my understandings resulting from my review of the extant literature will have influenced the questions I chose to ask my participants, and also how I analyze the interview data. My interaction with the interview participants will have in turn influenced my understanding of the literature. To apply the Gadamerian hermeneutical process to this project requires an extended conversation between the researcher, the literature, and the research participants that will not be concluded until all of the data is included in the discussion. Ideally, the process of employing the hermeneutical circle will result in an understanding of the subject in a unique way.

4.2.3 The interview questions

After reflecting on my own preunderstandings and the new understandings I gained from reviewing the literature, I turned my attention to the questions I would ask my participants. After listing a few informational questions regarding their personal spiritual history and their experience with The Wesleyan Church, I focused on a single primary question designed to elicit the interviewees' stories in their own words, with minimal further prompting. It is typical for phenomenological interviews to include very few questions, in order to allow the respondent to talk at length about their experience without interruption. The primary question I asked of every participant was, "You are participating in this study because you believe you have had a spiritually transforming experience related to corporate worship. Can you tell me about that experience?" (See "Interview Questions" in Appendix A.) I also included several possible follow-up questions that I could turn to if I needed more information. These questions were often tailored to what the person had already shared with me.

4.2.4 Analysis of interviews

The interviews, as noted below, were conducted in person, one-on-one. I made an audio-only recording of each interview, taking notes of visual cues when I felt they might be helpful for my analysis later. When the interviews were completed, they were transcribed. I began by transcribing them myself, but after completing two of the interviews, I quickly realized that the time involvement was prohibitive. I turned to the transcription service offered by the NVivo data analysis software program. When the transcriptions were finished, I listened to the recordings to compare them to the transcriptions and made corrections as necessary. The next step in the analysis process was coding, or forming thematic categories in order to understand what they communicated about their experiences.

Deciding how to share the data began with a process of "dwelling" with the interviews for a time. Seidman says, "There is no substitute for total immersion in the data."[305] Making meaning out of a disparate collection of stories while remaining true to the intentions of the story tellers as well as determining how those stories, loosely related to a common subject, make sense together, is a complicated task. One of my participants thought it would be like "trying to take all these grasshopper things and pull it together into something." This is a fairly accurate description. My first task, then, was to decide which grasshoppers were important and why they were important, and then look at how they relate to each other.

To determine what was important, I needed to go back to my research question and identify the primary thing I was searching for, which was experiences of spiritual transformation connected to corporate worship. I was interested in examining as many of the experiences related by my participants as possible, as long as the person identified that experience as spiritually transformational. I chose not to apply criteria to this question of spiritual transformation that align with a specifically Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification, for two reasons. First, as seen in the literature review, the criteria for what constitutes sanctification and how it is received is not agreed upon by all Wesleyans. Second, based on comments from the interviews, my participants themselves held divergent ideas regarding sanctification. Of the thirteen participants, there were two who did not expressly identify their experiences as transformational. They had memories of special church events in which they participated, but they did not express a sense that those events represented a change in their lives. Eleven stories remained for further analysis. The second half of my research question, regarding corporate worship, was treated separately from the analysis of the reported transformational experience. For the eleven remaining stories, I started looking for more commonalities by coding the interviews using NVivo. I first looked for repeated words or ideas, then grouped them into broader categories. This enabled me to find commonalities in the stories. From what seemed to be a disparate group of stories, threads eventually emerged that served to connect them in ways that illuminated three things: the commonalities among the transforming experiences, the reported effects of the experience, and the types of things that may have been influential in bringing these people to a place where transformation was possible. These could be called themes, but, in my mind, the idea of threads describes it better. Seidman uses the term "connecting threads" to describe what the researcher looks for

[305] Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 3rd ed. (New York, London: Teachers College Press, 2006), 128.

in the analysis process.[306] They are the ideas that connect the experiences of this group of people and tie them together into cohesive thoughts out of which patterns may be identified. Three primary threads emerged from this process: 1) The experiences, 2) The self-reported effects, and 3) The possible influences. Within these three primary threads, commonalities between the stories were identified as secondary threads. From this process of coding the interviews, I was able to develop an analysis of what these particular Wesleyans have experienced regarding spiritual transformation and corporate worship, followed by comparison with the literature.

4.3 Research Practicalities

Research involving people must be governed by procedures that protect the participants as well as ensure that the data collected will be of the highest quality. A description of the steps that were taken and the reasons for my decisions follow.

4.3.1 Participant selection and recruitment

My first criterion in recruiting participants was that they were part of my own denomination, The Wesleyan Church. There are other Wesleyan-Holiness churches that have very similar, sometimes nearly identical, doctrines. In order to limit the scope of the study, I began by limiting it to the one denomination to which I would have easy access. Since I want to bring understanding of my topic to my own denomination, this choice made sense to me. I hope to identify patterns within local churches in my denomination that would help leaders see how people in their churches experience corporate worship and sanctification.

The second part of choosing participants was location. Since I am a missionary in the Philippines, it might seem that I should do my research there. However, the culture of the Philippines is quite different than my own. For various reasons, I decided it would be preferable to interview people from the culture in which I grew up and with which I still identify. There are Wesleyan churches in the Philippines, but I am not conversant with their particular espoused theology on this subject. The Wesleyan Church worldwide is somewhat de-centralized, and learning the precise point of view of The Wesleyan Church of the Philippines would have required an extra layer of research prior to even considering the interview process. Additionally, interviewing cross-culturally presents difficulties in regard to language use, even if the interviewees speak English, not to mention understanding the

[306] Ibid., 125.

meaning of gestures, and the possibility of violating cultural norms that could cause misunderstanding or mistrust on the part of the interviewer and/or the interviewee.[307] Another obstacle, especially in hierarchical societies in Asia, is the perception of a power differential between me and anyone I would want to interview. As a mature, ordained Wesleyan minister and an educator at a seminary, I am given honor, which sometimes could mean that people would tell me what they think I want to hear. I did not feel I had adequate experience in interviewing to be able to elicit transparency from interviewees in my host culture.

As missionaries, my husband and I regularly return to our home in North Carolina, in the United States, to visit churches in that area. I used the opportunity of our scheduled return to recruit participants, with the permission of the pastors of the churches we visited (See "Pastors' Letter" in Appendix B). In addition, we attended the annual conference of our district in North Carolina. This conference is a business meeting and gathering time attended by ministerial and lay delegates from every church in the district. It is also open to any other persons affiliated with The Wesleyan Church who wish to attend as visitors. Every year during this conference, the missionaries who are in the area are invited to greet the conference. I was given permission by the district superintendent, who chairs the conference, to recruit participants for my research during our greeting time. In each location, I asked those who were interested to see me after the meeting, at which time I gave them a small form to fill out with their name and contact information (See "Participation Form" in Appendix C). As a result of these public appeals, I received fourteen positive responses. The only criteria I required of the participants were that they had been attending a Wesleyan church regularly for at least two years, to ensure they would have enough exposure to the particular operant theology and patterns of worship in that church to be able to talk about it; that they were over eighteen years of age, and that they had had an experience of spiritual transformation related to corporate worship. I intentionally left the description of the type of experience I was looking for as general as possible, in order to avoid limiting how people responded. I anticipated that if I left the question quite open, the stories I would hear would provide an interesting variety of views on the subject.

My first contact with the respondents was initially by telephone, when possible. If I could not reach them, I sent an email. I was able to connect with thirteen of the fourteen respondents. One person never returned my calls or emails. The second contact was an email with an

[307] Kvale and Brinkmann, *InterViews*, 144–45.

attached information sheet (See documents “Text of follow-up email” and “Participant Information Sheet” in Appendix D). In the email, I asked the participants to respond and let me know if they were still interested in participating. If so, I called them to set up appointments. All thirteen at this point were still willing to participate. When the appointments were set, I sent each participant a consent form to sign and bring with them to our meeting. If they did not bring their form, I had extra forms available for them to read and sign when we met (See Appendix E, “Consent Form”).

The thirteen participants represented eight Wesleyan churches in North Carolina. Eight respondents were women and five were men. I did not require them to be official members of The Wesleyan Church; only regular attenders. I did not ask them if they were official members or not. All of my participants expressed that they are very engaged, regularly attending at least Sunday morning worship services, and often also participating in Sunday evening and/or weeknight services. None expressed any continued affiliation with any other denomination. Although I did not require them to be formal members of The Wesleyan Church, I will call all of them “Wesleyans,” since what mattered to me was that they had been regularly exposed to worship in a Wesleyan church for a significant amount of time. Six participants had been Wesleyans since birth. Three of the others had been Wesleyans for more than twenty years, and four had been Wesleyans for less than twenty years. The shortest time any of the participants had been associated with The Wesleyan Church was five years. The ages were between 24 and 75. Two of the respondents were currently pastors (though not at the time of the experience they related to me), and four were pastors’ spouses. Three of the pastors’ spouses were worship/music leaders. All of the participants expressed commitment to their church, and most were involved in some type of ministry activity within their church and/or sponsored by their church in their community, such as Sunday school, children’s clubs, food banks, divorce recovery programs, prison ministries, crisis pregnancy centers, and the like.

The relationship of the participants to me was a concern in the recruitment process. Since I have been a missionary from this district for over twenty years, and a pastor’s wife in the district for six years before that, most of the long-time Wesleyans in the district at least know who I am, even if I do not know them personally. Of the respondents, I personally knew five of them before I recruited volunteers. I had probably met some of the others at some time, but had no memory of it. Because I was aware of this dynamic, I never approached anyone

directly to ask if they would participate—they all responded to my public appeals, and I treated all the participants equally in regard to the information I shared with them and in how the interviews were conducted. The only difference I noticed between the ones I knew previously and the others was that conversations seemed to flow more easily with the people I already knew. A sense of shared history sometimes meant that I had some insight into what the person was trying to describe, and it was easier to ask a follow-up question to confirm what I thought they were saying. With some of the others, I may have missed opportunities to ask the same type of follow-up questions.

4.3.2 Ethical considerations

This study was done with the approval of the Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business at the University of Aberdeen (see "Email Ethical Approval" in Appendix F). The ethical considerations involved issues of privacy and data protection, including how those issues are affected by international travel, and COVID-19 protections.

4.3.2.1 Privacy and data protection

Stories of personal experience of any kind can contain sensitive information that could cause harm to the participant if shared. Therefore, all records of emails, telephone calls, and interviews have been held under secure conditions. Paper records have been scanned, saved securely, and the paper copies destroyed. All digital files have been stored on an encrypted, external hard drive that is stored in a locked box in a locked office when not in use. Copies of all the files have also been stored on a secure drive on the servers at the University of Aberdeen. In the following report of my findings from the interviews, the names of all the participants have been anonymized. The names of their locations, churches, pastors, other people they mentioned, or any other identifying detail have been omitted or anonymized to protect the participant. The Wesleyan Church is not a large denomination. Many people in the district where the study was conducted know each other, especially among the long-time Wesleyans, and it is conceivable that the participants could be identified in multiple ways that could be revealed in their stories. I have done my best to prevent that from happening.

4.3.2.2 International Travel

The possibility of data being stolen while I was traveling internationally was a concern for the ethics committee. Therefore, after conducting my interviews in the United States and before I traveled to the Philippines, I removed all the files pertaining to the participants from

my personal computer and from my encrypted hard drive. Everything was stored securely on the University of Aberdeen server. When I got to my home in the Philippines, I was able to access the files and return them to my secure external hard drive for ease of access while working with them. Nothing with personal information is stored, even temporarily, on my personal computer.

4.3.2.3 COVID-19

The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2021. When I first applied for ethical approval several months prior to my arrival in the U.S., the committee required that all interviews be conducted via Microsoft Teams because the COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing. I was not entirely comfortable with that prospect, anticipating that people from a wide range of ages might respond, and some might not want to participate if it had to be conducted online. I had spent the previous academic year teaching classes and hosting small groups online, and was familiar with the limitations of that format, especially regarding body language and ease of conversation. Fortunately, in the U.S., the pandemic's severity had decreased enough by June 2021 that the ethics committee approved an exemption that allowed me to interview participants in person, as long as I followed several requirements to keep the participants and myself as safe as possible from infection (See "COVID Safety Questions" document in Appendix G).

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has been a description of the methodology I used for this project, beginning with the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, and the research design built on that foundation. To elicit stories of personal, spiritually transformational events, phenomenology was the most fitting option as a basis for my research. To combine that research with an extensive literature review of theology required a hermeneutical approach to phenomenology, as proposed by Heidegger and Gadamer. Choosing phenomenology as the philosophical guide, the research required a qualitative approach, carried out by one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. The processes of formulating the interview questions, conducting the interviews, and analyzing the resulting data were then described. The chapter ended with the practicalities of conducting the interviews and collecting the data. The procedures required to design a research project that produces meaningful and reliable results represent thoughtful considerations regarding the purpose of the research and the best ways to conduct it. The goal

of this research design is to elicit a coherent picture of what is happening in The Wesleyan Church today regarding the relationship between sanctification and corporate worship.

5 Research Findings

This chapter is an overview of my phenomenological inquiry into the possible link between corporate worship and spiritual transformation. As noted in the methodology chapter, I determined that qualitative research consisting of one-on-one semi-structured interviews would be the best approach for this inquiry. Grounded in a Gadamerian hermeneutical framework, this report of my findings represents my identification and analysis of the lived experiences of members of The Wesleyan Church relating to corporate worship and spiritual transformation, or sanctification. This chapter reflects the first of Osmer's four tasks of practical theology, which he calls "a paradigm of reflective practice" that exemplifies a hermeneutical circle or spiral. The first task reflected here is the "descriptive-empirical task." This task asks the question, "What is going on?"[308] My purpose in this chapter is to answer that question. In the tapestry metaphor presented in the introduction, this chapter represents identifying and sorting the threads of different colors in preparation for weaving them with the theological foundation threads into a picture of how people in The Wesleyan Church have experienced God's transformational grace in their lives.

I am basing the organization of this chapter on the recommendations of Harry Wolcott[309] and Irving Seidman.[310] Wolcott recommends beginning with a description of the data. Seidman differs with Wolcott only on the terminology here, preferring the term "sharing the data." [311] I am following Seidman on this particular point, because I will share the participants' stories in their own words more than describing them in my words. Although I will be sharing parts of the interviews verbatim, it would be impossible to simply share the data in a way that communicates meaning without doing some analysis. According to Wolcott, "description [or sharing] and analysis tend to meld as the account unfolds. …To make sense, you have to start combining things, aggregating data, discerning patterns."[312] These decisions move beyond simple data-sharing into the first steps of analysis. The stories as presented are not presented in their raw form; they have been curated and organized into groups. Seidman refers to the analytical process as a "dialectical" process. He says, "The participants have spoken, and now the interviewer is responding to their words, concentrating his or her intuition and intellect on

[308] Osmer, "Practical Theology: A Current International Perspective," 2.
[309] Harry F. Wolcott, ed., *Writing Up Qualitative Research*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles, London: SAGE, 2009).
[310] Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*.
[311] Ibid., 128.
[312] Wolcott, *Writing Up Qualitative Research*, 31.

the process."[313] Even the choices I made regarding which parts of the interviews to include involve analysis, as does the process of identifying the commonalities and any parts that I determined to be important. Thus, practically, this will be a combination of Osmer's descriptive task combined with initial analysis. Further analysis will be conducted in the following chapter.

This chapter begins with my observations regarding the participants, their stories, and my personal interactions with both. I have called this section "Reflexive Notes." Following that is the section titled "Connecting Threads." This section reveals the themes and sub-themes regarding spiritual transformation that I found in the data. I have called these themes and sub-themes "primary threads" and "secondary threads," in alignment with the tapestry metaphor. After beginning with sharing the stories of my participants as primary threads, the secondary threads will be a discovery and analysis of the commonalities and differences among them.

In my conversations with my Wesleyan participants, some terminology was used that may be considered insider jargon. These terms are not limited to The Wesleyan Church. Most are common in American evangelical churches in general. One that came up often is the idea of being or getting "saved." This is understood as a time when someone makes a personal, intentional decision to follow Christ. Until that happens, the general understanding in evangelical circles is that a person is not yet a Christian. In Wesleyan soteriological language, this is the point of justification. Another word used was "convicted." One interviewee, Anna, said, "As a child, I was convicted of my wrong-doings…at an early age." This is an example of what Wesley called "prevenient grace," when the Holy Spirit gives an awareness of the need for salvation and the desire to seek it. It can also be used by someone who has already experienced justification, but is made aware of sin in their life. Also found in the interviews is a tacit expectation of direct communication from God, whether by an actual voice, a feeling, or some other form of communication. Related by the participants in various ways, this is an expression of the "spiritual sense" that Wesley talked about when a person has a relationship with God. The assurance of salvation for believers would fall into the same category. For the sake of brevity, I will use these terms without further explanation when they occur in the interviews.

[313] Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*, 126–27.

5.1 Reflexive notes

The process of collecting, reviewing, interpreting, and analyzing my interview data resulted in encounters with multiple horizons of meaning, from my own horizon prior to beginning the research for the thesis, to the views expressed by the authors in my literature review, and then to the understandings expressed by my research participants. I visualize all the different horizons like soap bubbles—as they touch, they change each other. I see my horizons—all of my understanding and presuppositions about the subject at hand—as a group of bubbles attached to each other. When this group of bubbles comes into contact with another person's group of bubbles, not all of them will change significantly. Some, however, will melt together to form one larger bubble, where both people gain understanding from each other. Other bubbles touch, but do not completely melt into each other. They may change shape, but do not take on the contents of the other bubble. Even in the touching, though, there is some transfer of information. In the case of a soap bubble, there is a combining of liquid between the two, even if only at the point where they touch. The metaphor breaks down when applied to the literature review, as my horizon does not affect the horizons of the authors. From my perspective, their "bubbles" are impenetrable. However, my pre-understandings necessarily affected my reading of the literature, including what I chose to read as well as how I reacted to it, taking it into my "bubble" or rejecting it. As I worked through my literature review, my views on these subjects were variously challenged, expanded, changed, and confirmed by my interaction with the texts. These views were then affected by my interaction with the interview data.

Due to the timing of my scheduled visit to the United States, the interviews took place while I was in the midst of working on my literature review. I did not intentionally alter my planned literature research as a result of my interaction with the participants, but it must be acknowledged that there could have been an effect, even though I am not aware of it. In an attempt to keep the two processes separate, I did not engage in any further interaction with the interview recordings until I had finished the literature review, in an attempt to not influence my interaction with the literature beyond my own pre-understandings. While I did not intentionally attempt to alter the horizons of my participants during the interviews, the simple fact that I asked for their stories and asked follow-up questions about specific areas certainly affected how they perceived the importance of the things they shared with me. And, in turn, their stories affected how I perceived my questions as well as what I thought I knew,

or my preconceptions, about the subjects at hand, most significantly as I listened to the recordings, read and re-read the transcripts, and processed what I had learned. The juxtaposition of my reading of the literature and the stories related by these individuals provided much food for thought.

In my interviews and subsequent sharing and analysis, I refrained from making value judgments or generalities based on what was shared by individuals. Guided by Marion's statement quoted in the methodology chapter, "A phenomenon is a self-displaying event," I sought simply to discover the participants' lived experiences with the concepts of corporate worship and spiritual transformation. As noted in the last chapter, the primary question I asked of every participant was, "You are participating in this study because you believe you have had a spiritually transforming experience related to corporate worship. Can you tell me about that experience?" The interviews revealed mixed understandings of both terms, "spiritual transforming experience" and "corporate worship." I attempted to clarify my questions without guiding their answers in any particular direction. I did eventually ask about their understanding of the word "sanctification" if it did not come up in their story. Most, not all, had some idea about its meaning. Sometimes their unexpected answers to my questions were enlightening, revealing ways of looking at the two subjects that I had not previously considered. Some things that were expressed were expected, such as conflating "music" and "worship," as if none of the other parts of the service constituted worship, even after I made it clear in my question that I meant the entire worship service. In my experience, this misunderstanding is common.

The most interesting thing to me about the interviews was that every one of them was different. There were no "cookie cutter" experiences reported. This was also the aspect of the interview data that required the most mental effort to bracket my own assumptions while trying to understand the essence of what they were saying. My horizon before engaging with the interviews included my personal experience as well as what I had taken in from my literature review. In the literature I read, the link between sanctification and corporate worship is generally presented quite clearly. Corporate worship includes many of the means of grace, and therefore it has the potential to be transformational. This idea resonated with my own experience of the importance of worship to my spiritual life. In the initial reading of the interviews, however, the expression of this relationship was not obvious, and seemed tenuous at best. In the end, there was no "smoking gun" in the interviews—no single experience that

easily described how participation in corporate worship was the factor that precipitated a sanctifying experience, although there were some dramatic experiences that will be explored. This "smoking gun" may have been something I dreamed of finding, but in reality I did not expect it. Spiritual experience is a phenomenon that must be approached as such—a phenomenon. As van Manen says, "The meaning or essence of a phenomenon is never simple or one-dimensional. Meaning is multi-dimensional and multi-layered."[314] Sanctification is a spiritual phenomenon that cannot be quantified or tied down to a specific process or procedure that applies to everyone. However, the stories of these particular people illuminate their lived experiences regarding corporate worship and sanctification, and those experiences provide insight into how these subjects are understood and experienced by people in the "real" world, adding to a broader understanding of a complicated subject.

5.2 Connecting threads

Because each of the stories shared in the interviews is so particular, categorizing them felt like a violation of their individuality. However, finding themes that emerge from the stories is a necessary process in order to reflect meaningfully on them. Van Manen suggests that using themes to reflect on lived experience is simply "a means to get at the notion we are addressing."[315] He also points out, "No conceptual formulation or single statement can possibly capture the full mystery of this experience. …A thematic phrase only serves to point at, to allude to, or to hint at, an aspect of the phenomenon."[316] Thus, while organization of the disparate information revealed in the stories shared by my participants was essential for making meaning, I am aware that some parts of the stories, and some complete stories, are left out in favor of the parts that I considered to be most relevant to my research topic. This required some theoretically-informed judgment. After all, my participants were aware of my research question, and they all shared their personal stories prompted by their own understanding of the question. As the researcher, my understanding of the question had to inform my curation of the stories. At the same time, comments or stories that at first hearing did not at first seem to be on point, upon further reflection provided insights that I did not expect, adding depth to the project and expanding my own understanding of my research question.

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[314] Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy*, 2nd ed. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 78.

[315] Ibid., 79.

[316] Ibid., 92.

5.2.1 Primary thread one: The experiences

After asking the primary interview question as noted above, I allowed the participants to tell me whatever they wanted to, without interruption as much as possible. I wanted to be sure to hear their story as they remembered their experience, without interruption. Occasionally, a participant would ask for clarification, which I provided, while still leaving the question open to however they wished to respond. When I felt I needed more detail or clarification, I asked follow-up questions. In this section, I will first recount the basic story of each person's experience(s), then I will discuss the secondary threads, which are the commonalities I found among them. When possible in this section, I will leave out the parts of the stories that refer to either results or influences, saving those for the next sections. This was not always possible, as sometimes these things were included in the telling of the story.

Chuck

Chuck, a pastor whose family affiliated with The Wesleyan Church when he was ten years old, related a story from his time as a student in a Wesleyan university. He said,

> …we would do chapel services on Tuesdays and Thursdays that were a corporate worship experience together. And, um, oh man. [Audible sigh, pause] That morning, I don't remember any of the service. Other than, it was student-led worship, and I remember the person who was speaking. And what they were speaking on was not what God was speaking to me. See, I remember in that moment that God convicted me of being very loose with my definition of what sin was. …And I remember, in that moment when the word was opened, and the speaker started speaking, it was like there was a mute button on him, and the Lord was dealing with *me*. And I remember in that moment, God saying distinctly to me, "Chuck, you have a choice in this. You can either follow me and mean this, or you can not. I'm not going to be honored if you continue to go down this path." I was met with the holiness of God in that moment.
>
> And it wasn't just me in that moment, either. There were other people that were in that same room that God had done something in them, too…there were a lot of tears. …It was almost a, …a God-inspired sorrow, or brokenness of confession. And yet, in that moment, also experiencing the grace of God in that confession and that lament. …This was a corporate lament.

Betty

Betty is a pastor's wife and a worship leader, born into a Wesleyan family. She reported being saved at a very young age. Her most dramatic transformational moment happened when she was 21 years old, at a "breakout session" during a youth convention. She

remembers who the speaker was, but, like Chuck, she doesn't remember what the speaker said. She did, however, experience *someone* speaking to her. She said, "I felt Christ directly speaking to me." What was communicated to her, however, she could not explain in words. She said,

> I just felt the overwhelming love of Christ that just cleansed, and, um, I don't know that I can put words to that. [pause] It was just I knew Jesus loved me all my life, but that was very transforming for me of experiencing that love and not just the love, but it was a love so compelling of I wanted to leave behind things that I knew were displeasing to him.

Betty described this moment as "when the Lord sanctified me." Following this particular experience, Betty recalled further experiences that she felt were a continuation of her sanctification journey. She said,

> A lot of the ones that stand out in my mind have been at youth camps during either the music part of it before and after the end of the services of again that feeling of, you know, just making sure that all that I am is surrendered and obedient. There have been a couple of times where I really felt the Holy Spirit saying, "I need you to lay this down for now." And I would struggle with it for a while, and it was in those worship times that I would say, "OK, I'm laying this down."

Anna

Anna had what she called a "real deep experience." Anna is a woman over retirement age, the wife of a retired pastor and currently a part-time worship leader. She was born into a Wesleyan family, and also reported being saved as a young child. She said, "My heart was always tender. And I always wanted to serve the Lord." But it wasn't until she was "forty-ish" that she had an experience that she felt was transformational. She said,

> I really searched the Scriptures. And I remember [at this point Anna paused and got choked up] …kneeling at my couch in my home and saying, "Lord, *everything*," [She was lightly hitting the table for emphasis while talking]. And I remembered the song, "Whatever it Takes." That spoke to me so deeply, and it kind of became my theme song – "Whatever it Takes." And I would go back to that time, where I said, "Whatever it takes, I want it, I want to be the Lord's; I want to be used of the Lord." And so, I wanted the Lord to do whatever needed to be done in my heart to transform me. I would never be perfect, I won't be perfect. But, the Lord did a work in my life.

Anna had another experience about 25 years later, where she recognized a pattern of sin in a particular area of her life, and she took the steps to change it. She said, “There was still some of that carnal nature that would just rise up.”

Frieda

Frieda, a Wesleyan for more than 40 years, a pastor’s wife and sometime worship leader, related many “moments” in her spiritual journey that were meaningful to her, especially related to music. But, while these were spiritual experiences that affected her faith story, they were not what she described as life-changing, or sanctifying experiences. She did not share what she called her “initial sanctification” story with me until 35 minutes into the interview. But this was the most dramatic experience that shaped her life from that moment on. Her “sanctification” story begins at the end of her college experience, but her spiritual journey began much earlier. Frieda said she was saved at about eight years old, and that she “dedicated her life to the Lord to do with as he wanted and how he wanted” at that point, and that was how she lived her life. The following story was clearly a “crisis” moment for her. Her story begins when she left home to do an internship in another state at the end of her college degree. She said,

> When I came home from there, I knew that’s where God wanted me to go. But then I came home and the voices around me were saying, “You don’t have any money, you don’t have a car, why don’t you…” …And I was looking for a job. I couldn’t find anything. I was not at peace. …And one day everybody else had gone to work and was out of the house…and I was still in bed and I'm laying there and I’m rolling around wrestling with this. And finally, I said, “Okay, God, I’ll do what you want. I don't really want to leave. I love my family. I love where I live. I love my church. There’s nothing wrong with where I am right now that I'm trying to get away. But if this is where you want, I hate leaving my family because I love my family.” And the Lord said, “I will be your family. I will give you family wherever you go. And I will be with you to the ends of the world. I’ll be with you always.” And I surrendered at that point and said, “Okay, I’m yours, lock, stock and barrel.” …And it was a giving to him everything that I was, all my talent, and who I was, who I would meet, giving him my family, and all of that.

Jenny

Jenny is a woman who has a physical condition that has resulted in hospital stays and surgeries. After one surgery, while she was still in the hospital, a friend from her church came to visit her. As Jenny was recovering from surgery, she did not have a clear memory of what

happened. When she got home, she said to her mother, “I thought I was singing with the angels.” Her mother then told her about the visit from her friend. Jenny says,

> I heard that [my friend] and I were singing. I love the old hymns, and it just—I could hear the angels singing. And [my friend] had read some scripture to me. And then we sang and we sang and we sang. …That was the biggest thing of worship that I’ve ever been a part of. …To be honest I don’t know if I was conscious. I know I was conscious, but how much, I was just going up and down. I was with the angels, singing with the angels. And at some point in time, I spent time in heaven and hell, you know? [Rebecca] During that time? [Jenny] Yes. And I honestly believe I died at some point. I can still hear the angels singing today. And it’s just, I mean, that’s the biggest transformation I’ve ever known.

Since Jenny expressed that this was transformational to her but didn’t elaborate, I asked her how she felt this experience changed her. She said that it gives her continued hope when she struggles. It has become a touchstone for her.

Donald

Donald is one of the newer Wesleyans in my study, having affiliated with The Wesleyan Church only 12 years ago. He is another person who has physical issues that have resulted in multiple surgeries. His story begins with his initial visit to the church when he responded to an invitation for a service during the Christmas season. He says,

> I came in and our candles were out and the Christmas tree was up, and it was just, as soon as I walked in the door, I just got like a different sensation from what I usually felt at a lot of the other churches that I've attended. It just felt like home. And the Lord spoke to me and he said, “This is it.” Nothing else. “This is it. This is the church you're supposed to be in.”

A few years later, Donald was feeling discouraged by his personal battle with his health. He expressed that the discouragement clouded his thinking about the church, and he was considering leaving and finding another church. He continues his story:

> I had to have some pretty life-threatening surgery with my spine—paralyzed for a while from the waist down, about 75 percent. So I had to learn how to walk again. And so the church really supported me and it felt like family. And they checked on me all the time and I just, I was in tears of joy because I knew that my doubt was just—I put my doubt on the back burner because I doubted it, but my church supported me. And that, spiritually, for me, that's what redeemed my long, you know, decision to remain in this church. And so I knew this was my church for life.

Donald's newfound dedication to his local church led him to attend the yearly district conference. He said,

> This conference changed everything. …It reached me on a spiritual level of, like, excitement. It filled me with God's energy and his love for me, that I'm not alone and there's always people out here that I can learn from. And so this got me into a mode of like, wanting to learn more and be Christlike and live like he wants me to live…and making those changes to the next level. …Without a shadow of a doubt, I'm excited to do it.

George

George is a lifelong Wesleyan. He has been the worship leader in his church for a number of years. George relates a period of time that was transformational to him in his role as a worship leader. He struggled with knowing how other people on his worship team at the church were not living up to the spiritual ideals that George thought were necessary for them as worship leaders. He says,

> "I felt like one of the things God told me was, "Okay, first of all, your worship team is your area of influence. This is people that you are to be ministering to yourself. And so these are the disciples you are making." …And so that was one major thing that came out of corporate worship, because I'd be up there leading worship some Sundays and be thinking about, okay, so and so here beside me, I know what they did this past week and they're up here helping me worship, singing about God and, and it was a struggle to worship for me those days too, in the middle of a corporate worship time. And it wasn't until God kind of reminded me that nobody's perfect, that, "George, you've failed at times, too. But I still accepted your worship." That was a big thing too, to try to understand God's grace. [And I was] thinking about these things going on around me on stage, while at the same time seeing people responding in the congregation in ways they never had. I'm like, "Okay, the Spirit's obviously here." And you know, if my thoughts of, "You have to be perfect if you're on stage for God's presence to show up," well, he just shot that down.

Evan

Evan, a man over 60 years old, related his initial salvation experience as his transformational moment. I have chosen to include it here because of some of the things he said about it. In Wesleyan doctrine, it is recognized that it is possible, but rare, for salvation (justification) and sanctification to occur at the same time. Evan described it as "coming to the other side from not being a Christian to being a Christian." Here is Evan's story:

> I grew up in a household that went to church, but I was there physically, but I hadn't, I didn't…I ran for a long time. And my conversion happened late in life,

> like, 48 to 50. …All the way back to high school, even though I was not on fire, I experienced several miracles and, after the second one, I knew that they were real and could not have been coincidental. It was just that I was not yet ready to commit. I needed a mentor who had not come into my life yet but finally did. So, when I made the transition, it was so stark, the transition, because I always had trouble with forgiving. I never understood what forgiving was, because I didn't do it. I wanted to get even. And, before I became a Christian, I read the Bible–I started reading the Bible, prior to becoming a Christian, and read it seven or eight times, and I started to get these various visions of things. One of the best visions that I ever had was that I understood exactly what forgiveness was. And that eased a burden that I had had all my life, like nothing else that would have ever happened. I don't think I would have ever learned to actually do that.

Ian

This story spans 18 years. Ian is a retired pastor. Becoming a pastor is part of his story. He describes his transformational experience as when he "rededicated" his life, but it doesn't end there. He had been a Christian since he was twelve, but he said, "I rededicated my life at one of the youth weeks that I attended, and have been going strong ever since."

> [Rebecca] So tell me about rededicating your life. [Ian] It wasn't that I felt like I'd done anything [bad]. It was just a really emotional day and it was a youth week. And I can't now tell you who the speaker was, but it was just a big wave of emotion that came over everyone. The altars were full and I was just compelled—I had to go down. And so at that point in time, I considered that a rededication because it, really, at that point in time, was where I really felt the Lord calling me, and I wouldn't say anything about it. When I was here [at this church] before, we were really, really missions oriented and we even had two, three couples out of the church that went into the ministry field [overseas missions] and I was so afraid that's what the Lord was calling me to, and I was scared to death. And so I wouldn't say anything, wouldn't talk about it, wouldn't do anything. And it took me years that the Lord repeatedly told me, "It's time, it's time."

Eighteen years after his "rededication," Ian was driving down the road. He described what happened:

> A big wave of emotion hit me. I started crying. And I came straight to the church. I can't tell you how I got here, how many stoplights I ran, or anything else. …I just walked in and told the secretary, "I need to see the pastor." And all I could do is sit there and cry. Finally I was able to tell the pastor that I had been running from God for the past eighteen years, because he called me to the ministry, and I said "no." I had never been able to escape God's calling on my life. And I didn't want to go on being miserable for the rest of my life.

Ian connected these two events as components of the same transformational experience that changed his life.

Kari

Kari married young, had an unhappy marriage, and had an affair with a co-worker. Her marriage ended in divorce, as did her co-worker's. Four years later, she married her co-worker. Her transformation story began in her pastor's office.

> I remember just sitting in [my pastor's] office and he was talking to me and my husband that I have now. And he was talking to us about getting married and everything. I couldn't do anything but cry. I cried the whole time. And when we got married, the whole marriage service, my husband and I–I've never seen it before, but we boo-hooed the whole time. We cried going in. We cried coming out. We just boo-hooed. …Ever since then, I have faithfully served the Lord. I can honestly say that. I'm not saying I haven't made mistakes and had to ask for forgiveness, but I have absolutely no desire to sin, and I want to please him. I want to be a good servant. …I can honestly say, God saved, sanctified me, and filled me with the Holy Ghost.

Monica

Monica's story is one that cannot be defined as a single dramatic event. Growing up in the church as a pastor's daughter Monica professed an on-going relationship with Christ. She left her home to attend university, and only visited home occasionally during that time. When she finished her education and was married, she made a decision to return to her home church, where she was baptized and accepted into full membership as an adult. She said,

> The time I spent away from the church and then coming back to the church and actually becoming a member as an adult, like, choosing that separate from my family, that was a big step. That was a bit of a transformation. …I wasn't a member of a church at the time, but I still had a relationship with Christ. That time away from being involved and committing myself, it always seemed like something was missing. You know, so there was definitely a yearning to come back, to get closer, to do more. …I always had a relationship, but it wasn't overflowing to others. …I guess it was so easy to be lukewarm before that. I have transformed into always trying to stay hot, you know?

5.2.2 Experiences: Secondary Threads

The following are secondary threads identified in these stories of experience that I found to be common to a significant number of people. Although never exactly the same, these aspects of the stories reveal the similar ways in which people experienced transformation.

5.2.2.1 Seeking

This secondary thread reports on the people who were actively seeking something from God. It ranges from intentionally seeking a deeper spiritual experience to internally wrestling with questions. In these cases, the transformational experience did not necessarily come as a surprise, but the timing and nature of the event were still unexpected. Five of the eleven participants experienced this type of event.

I begin with Anna, who said she "really searched the Scriptures," and made a definite commitment to the Lord when she said, "Lord, everything." She desired the Lord to do whatever was necessary for a transformation in her life, and, in her words, "He did a work in my life."

Frieda and George were both wrestling internally and seeking answers. Frieda needed direction for a life decision; George needed understanding for a question affecting his ministry and his relationships with others. In both cases, they felt that God gave an answer to their problem, and when they responded positively to God's message to them, they experienced a transformation of their attitudes going forward.

Evan was not necessarily seeking transformation as such, but he was open to being mentored and learning about becoming a Christian. Perhaps it could be characterized as a discovery process. When a person who had been mentoring him invited him to "make the transition," he made a conscious decision and experienced a life transformation.

Monica also made a conscious decision. Although she was already a Christian, she felt the need to make a deeper commitment, and that decision changed the way she saw her relationship to Christ and others.

In all of these cases, the experience was not a surprise, but was something that was intentionally pursued or happened because of an intentional decision. This is in contrast to the other six, whose experiences were more unexpected.

5.2.2.2 Surprise!

Some of the following six respondents had unexpected experiences that were quite dramatic. Others, while not as dramatic, also experienced a transformation they did not expect.

Chuck and Betty were not necessarily seeking anything in particular when they felt God speaking directly to them. For Chuck, it was confrontational—he was confronted with his sin and the holiness of God, and given a choice. For Betty, it was overwhelming love, but the result was similar—she wanted to separate herself from things that would displease God. It was interesting to me that both Chuck and Betty said they could not remember what was said by the preacher in the service when they had their transformational experience. They both felt that they sensed God speaking to them in specific ways that changed how they lived their lives from that moment on.

Donald's story revolves around his commitment to a local church. By increasing his involvement with the local church and the denomination, Donald experienced an unexpected change in his outlook and purpose when he attended the church conference.

Ian's story is notable—both parts of his transformation story were a surprise for him. The first part was actually similar to what Chuck and Betty experienced. At a worship service, he felt compelled to go to the altar, and "felt the Lord calling" him. The second part was even more of a surprise, as he wasn't doing anything "spiritual" at the time. There was no church meeting, no searching, no conscious wrestling with anything before the emotion hit him. It was simply something that could be said to resemble St. Paul's Damascus Road experience. Another person had a similar type of experience to Ian's second experience. Kari was suddenly overcome by emotion that did not seem congruent with her circumstances. Kari was not consciously seeking a spiritually transforming experience at that time, either.

Jenny's experience, although it happened while she was semi-conscious, left a lasting impression on her. She experienced something she didn't expect when she entered the hospital, and it gave her continued hope after she left the hospital.

The surprising nature of these experiences cannot, of course, be neatly wrapped up together as any particular phenomenon. All that can be said is that the experiences happened unexpectedly for these particular people, and that they attribute whatever degree of transformation they feel to God working in them through their experience. Connecting the two types of experience, those that were sought for and those that were a surprise, what can be said about them is that all of these people counted these experiences as a time when God worked in their lives to change them.

5.2.2.3 Emotional response

Seven of these people reported having an emotional response during the experience. Chuck, Betty, Anna, Frieda, Donald, Ian, and Kari all reported some type of emotional response either during or following their experiences. Five specifically mentioned tears. Betty and Frieda experienced feelings of peace and joy. Betty also mentioned feeling a sense of freedom and physical warmth. Chuck spoke of a feeling of fear or awe in God's presence, including a physical feeling of heaviness, along with "Godly sorrow" over sin, followed by a sense of lightness and relief. Kari experienced a similar feeling about her past sins. She said she felt "sick and disgusted with the sins of my past." But when thinking about being forgiven, she said, "that thankfulness just bubbles over. So he gives me such a peace."

Anna still cried when she told her story to me many years after it happened. When I asked her if she would describe it as an emotional experience, she said, "I can't say it was just my mind. I'm sure there were tears, and all of that, but I can't say that it was just an emotional experience. It was both. …But my religion is very emotional. I love feeling the Spirit of the Lord, and I love just singing and crying, and praising the Lord." In response to this statement, I asked her, "How do you know it's the Spirit?" She laughed and said, "That's a good question! I'm sure that joy, ecstasy, tears—tears are a part of it. …Oh, how do I know? [Sigh] Hmmm… The emotion, I don't know. How do you feel when you're in love? How do you explain that? I'm sure that laughing, and tears, and joy, all of those wonderful emotions are part of it. But I can't just say, 'I know I had the Spirit here, but I didn't here.'"

Frieda said about emotional responses she reported regarding later spiritually significant experiences during times of singing in worship, "If you want to say it's a feeling, God fixed us so that we have feelings. So, yes, I know that I'm saved. But when I stand there and I sing to him, there's a great feeling that comes and it is a peace, it is a joy, it's just, it's unexplainable."

5.2.2.4 The "Voice" of God

All of the stories involved receiving what was perceived as direction from God in some way. Anna felt that the Lord used the Bible and Christian books to guide her. Ian and Monica both felt "called" to do certain things. Donald "experienced God's energy and love." Evan had what he called a "vision" of forgiveness. Frieda said "the Lord laid it on my heart" about direction for her life. George said "God reminded me." Kari said after she got married, she "just felt that tug all the time." Even Jenny felt that she heard the angels singing. Ian, Chuck,

Betty, and Donald came the closest to saying they actually "heard" the voice of God. Ian said "The Lord kept saying, "Ian, it's time." Chuck said, "I remember the person who was speaking. And what they were speaking on was not what God was speaking to me. …I remember in that moment, God saying distinctly to me…" In Betty's first story, she said "I felt Christ directly speaking to me," but she could not put it into words. She says she "felt the overwhelming love of Christ." In subsequent stories related to the continuation of her sanctifying journey, she said "I felt the Holy Spirit saying, 'I need you to lay this down for now.'" When Donald first visited his church, he said God told him "This is it."

How does a person describe the sensation of hearing from God? This phenomenon is obviously not new; it is reported in Scripture as well as in the historical writings of the church. Some of these people, like George and Frieda, just took it as a matter of course that God would be "speaking" to them to guide them. Whether it was perceived as words or simply "a tug," all of these people feel that God communicated with them. Even if the experience was unexpected, no one expressed surprise that God would communicate with them personally.

5.2.3 Primary thread two: The self-identified effects

This section will recount more from the respondents' stories, focusing on what they identified as immediate and ongoing effects of the experiences they reported to me.

If, in the course of telling the story, the participant did not mention how their life changed after their experience, I asked questions such as "How do you think that experience affected your life?" or "Can you see a difference in yourself before and after that experience?" In many cases, the respondents identified their transformational experience story as at least part of their sanctification journey. Because of this, I have included each person's understanding of what sanctification means, as it helps to understand their own assessment of the results of their experience, and contributes to my analysis of their experiences.

Chuck

Chuck's powerful, dramatic experience has had a long-lasting effect on his spiritual life. The immediate response was that he took the steps to correct the specific sin that he felt God was pointing out in his life. And, twenty years later, he says,

> From that day, there's been that choice, a conscious decision of, you know, what I'm choosing—am I choosing to love me more or am I choosing to love Jesus more? That's kind of what it's come down to because that really is the pursuit of sanctification, right? It's that I want to be free from sin. I want to be free from selfish desire in order that I can love Jesus more. And I don't want to do anything that's going to hurt that relationship. …And so, for me, it's been, from that day on, the conscious choice of "Okay, in everything that I do—because everything matters—in everything that I do, am I choosing Jesus or am I choosing myself?"

Betty

Betty's initial response to her experience of feeling what she called the "transforming power of his [Christ's] love" was a sense of freedom and a desire to please him. She also wanted to point out that this experience was not a "one and done." She considers her sanctification as a process, citing two later periods of time when she felt God was asking her to "lay things down" or to "pick things up." The stories she related to me of these times involved jobs, positions in the church, and relationships. Each of these times she struggled over what she felt God was asking her to do, but each time, in the end, she surrendered and did it, and each time she felt it resulted in a blessing for her and growth in her spiritual life. I asked her how she thought the first experience affected her life. She said,

> Seeing what that did in my life, the effect of that made me want more. More of the power to lay things down—the things that were not like him. The power to say, "I don't need that," and more than that, to not want it. …I remember another time when I said, "Lord, this is not like you and I invite you to—every time I'm tempted—I want you to stop me. I want to *abhor* this."

Betty continues to evaluate her relationship with God, taking opportunities to make sure "that all that I am is surrendered and obedient."

Anna

Many years after Anna's "deep experience," she still returns to the thought expressed in her theme song, "Whatever it Takes." The chorus of that song says,

> For whatever it takes to draw closer to You, Lord,
> That's what I'll be willing to do.
> And whatever it takes to be more like You,
> That's what I'll be willing to do.

Her commitment at that time to do "whatever it takes," continued to guide her, leading her to make a change in her life 25 years later. She said, "I remember it was a very distinct time. And I remember going to my husband and saying, 'I want you to forgive me,' and we talked. And then I remember, weeks later, he said, 'Wow, there have been some changes!'"

Anna also expressed her understanding of these events as sanctification, of which she says,

> I believe it is a process we have to go through. It's kind of like growing up. …I believe when we're sanctified, the Lord is faithful in tapping us on the shoulder when we do wrong. And that we have sorrow; we're very sorry for our sins. And I believe sanctification does that for us. It gives us that new nature that we *want* to serve the Lord.

Frieda

Frieda called the experience I related in the previous section her "initial sanctification," which already indicates her understanding of sanctification as a process. Her immediate response to this experience was to give God "everything that I was," and move twelve hundred miles from home with only three hundred dollars and no car. She said of that experience, "Everything moved smoothly." And, in her continuing experience, God "has never disappointed." Since that time, Frieda has been involved in multiple ministry positions in the church, usually involving music in some way. She believes that her continuing close relationship with God has given her an ability to use her talents to minister to others. As one example, she talked about planning musical performances with young people in the church, and working out how to use specific songs in the performance. She said,

> I would be singing and singing and singing the same songs over again. And the Lord would give me a visualization of how to use that song. …And when we do what little bit we can do…and leave the results up to God, he shows up in a mighty way. God is there, and he blesses it, and he blesses it again.

She described sanctification in this way: "Sanctification is different [than salvation] in that, not just am I saved, but I am giving my life back to him to do and to use as he wants. And he says, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy.' So, it's a constant moving towards him. Deeper and deeper and deeper and following after him."

Jenny

Jenny's experience of singing with the angels in the hospital is not a "typical" story of spiritual transformation. But she felt like it was a transformation, and she identified a result.

This experience gave Jenny hope. For a person with a chronic debilitating disease, that can be significant. She said, "Even now, I can look back, and sing or say, 'Great is Thy Faithfulness.' I can look back and see how he's faithful. He was faithful then, he's faithful now, and he'll be faithful in the days to come. When I'm really struggling with my illness, …I look back and see how he was faithful then." Whether or not there were actually angels singing with her, the words of the songs she sang with her friend brought hope to her.

Jenny's understanding of sanctification is also that it is an on-going process. She says,

> Living the sanctified life is an ongoing, moment by moment, day by day, laying down of yourself on the altar and saying, "Okay, God, this isn't mine, I can't handle this. This is yours. …I think when you reach that point of total surrender, it establishes more peace. More joy. And, you reach a point of living on the altar that–I hate to say it becomes easy, but I don't know what else to say–you're just like, "Okay, God, you want all of me, you have to help me continually give all of me over to you."

Donald

Donald's transformational experience at the district conference gave him a renewed commitment to his local church, to his denomination, and to growing in his ability to live the Christian life as he understood it. One specific area in which he experienced a change was regarding tithing. He said,

> I had battles with tithing. And, you know, I battled that for years, even when I came to church. And then we went to conference and as soon as I attended conference, on the way home, all that changed and I just knew that I needed to start tithing and doing my 10 percent. But it took that long, over 10 years of battling with that. So that was one thing that reached me spiritually.

Donald said his experience at the conference "got me excited to learn more and do more for the church," and also to "be Christlike and live like he wants me to live."

When I asked Donald if he had an idea of what sanctification means, he said that his medical condition sometimes creates memory problems, so he could not remember if he had heard about it or not.

George

George's response to God's correction of his attitude toward his worship team was, first, an awareness of God's grace in a new way. When I asked him how he thought that experience

changed him, he said, “I found myself not being quite as hard on people when they messed up or did something wrong, and I started remembering more often the things that I had done wrong, even as a Christian, that I wasn’t proud of. …I just found I was much more compassionate with people.” Regarding sanctification, George said, “All these experiences you have through your faith allows for us to grow in more of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And that process to me is sanctification—the process of giving more of your life over to God.”

Evan

Evan’s experience of “coming to the other side” produced dramatic changes in his life. Beyond his initial revelation about forgiveness, he said, “I realized that God is there with me in what I’m doing in a big way.” Evan loves to volunteer in the community and in whatever he can do for the church. He said, “You know, when you’re a volunteer, you get to do some of the fun things in life, like help people, donate food, do those things that God tells us to do, and try to bring people along for the ride, if we can. These are the things I get to do that I’ve realized that, before I was a Christian, I had no clue about any of that.” He said he also feels “compelled every day to get a little better in Christian knowledge, so I still do this every day.” He believes that he has become a better husband, especially now that his wife has a condition that causes chronic pain. Evan has a completely new outlook on life, saying, “I realize he’s in the birds that sing every morning. …There’s not many things that go by that I don’t feel him there. Then there are certain days that things don’t go well, and I realize that’s him, too, but he says he’s with me and he’s holding my hand. …I sense that he is there.” Evan has only been a Wesleyan for about 8 years, so he did not feel that he had a sufficient understanding about sanctification to comment on it.

Ian

Ian’s immediate response to his experience was to confess to his pastor what he saw as his disobedience to God and seek counsel. This led to his decision to pursue his delayed calling to ministry. Ian sold his successful business and went to school full-time to pursue a ministerial degree as an older student with two teenage children. Ian’s understanding of sanctification is:

> It’s a purification process. …None of us is ever going to be perfect in this world at all. Once you yield and the Holy Spirit speaks to you and you just continually have a walk and it’s just like that example of molding in clay. God’s taking a

> little bit away and adding a little bit to you all the time. It's just a matter of how you accept it. So, it's an ongoing walk with the Lord, is how I look at it now.

Kari

Kari said her response to God's "tug" in her life was that "I gave myself wholly to God. No looking back." Many years later, she says, "I have no desire to sin." She experiences gratefulness, peace, and thankfulness that "bubbles over." A notable result that Kari attributes to her sanctifying experience regards all of the difficult relationships resulting from previous marriages. She has friendly relationships with her husband's former wife, and her ex-husband and his current (third) wife. Her ex-husband's second wife, who subsequently married someone else who died, is now suffering financial hardship. Kari takes this woman shopping to help with her basic needs. Kari says, "Every time we come together, we hug and she just tells me how much she loves me and I tell her I love her. That's a God thing. You know, we've come kind of full circle in all of our relationships now. It could only happen through God's mercy and grace." Kari's understanding of sanctification is, "There's a difference in being forgiven and being saved, and completely giving your heart and your, your everything to God. […] I cannot actually say that all of a sudden I was sanctified. But I can say that I grew in that, and grew in that, and that it was a process."

Monica

Monica responded to a feeling of "something missing" and a "yearning" by becoming a member of her church and being baptized as an adult. She saw this as an important decision in her spiritual life that made her want to "always try to stay hot." She feels called to her involvement in ministry to children and teens, as well as to the Gideon Bible organization. She said that after this decision, these ministries, which in the past felt like obligations, are now "overflowing" from her relationship with Christ. Monica's idea of sanctification or spiritual transformation is "to continue to grow and to strive, and grow a relationship and sow these seeds."

5.2.4 Effects: Secondary threads

There are many commonalities I found as I read the self-identified long-term results of these experiences. These constitute the following secondary threads, including 1) Consecration/Surrender/Obedience, 2) Relationships with others, 3) Ministry or church involvement, 4) Awareness of and aversion to personal sin, 5) Desire to please or love

Jesus/Serve God/Grow/Learn, 6) Recognition of God's faithfulness, 7) Awareness of God's grace or forgiveness, and 8) Increase in religious affections.

5.2.4.1 Consecration/Surrender/Obedience

This thread includes what I would describe as a continuum of related responses. At one end is "consecration." The term "consecration" in the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification refers to the idea of someone giving everything, giving themselves, or offering everything they are to God to use in any way. A common phrase used is to "lay it all on the altar" or to "lay oneself on the altar." At the other end of this continuum would be obedience in a specific instance to what they understood that God wanted. Surrender implies that, in either case, there was a struggle. It could apply either to full consecration or obedience in a particular instance. Seven of the participants—Chuck, Betty, Anna, Frieda, Jenny, Ian, and Kari—reported some version of this response to their experience.

5.2.4.2 Relationships with others

Five of the respondents reported either improved relationships with others or a heightened appreciation for others. They were Anna, Donald, George, Evan, and Kari.

5.2.4.3 Ministry or church involvement

Five people reported new or increased involvement with their church, usually including ministry opportunities, either professional or volunteer. These were Frieda, Donald, Evan, Ian, and Monica.

5.2.4.4 Awareness of and aversion to personal sin

A new or heightened awareness of personal sin and an aversion to it was experienced by five of the participants, Chuck, Betty, Anna, George, and Kari.

5.2.4.5 Desire to please Jesus, love Jesus more, serve the Lord, or grow and learn more

Loving, pleasing, and serving are bundled together in this thread. They all express a desire to give something back to God in response to the gifts that have been received. Chuck, Betty, Anna, Donald, and Monica expressed this desire in various ways. A related desire for growth in their spiritual life and in knowledge was reported by three people: Donald, Evan, and Monica.

5.2.4.6 Recognition of God's faithfulness/continuous presence

Five of the participants spoke specifically about recognizing God's faithfulness in their lives after their experience. They were Anna, Frieda, Jenny, Donald, and Evan. There were other references to God's continued working, but these five were specific about what they considered God's faithfulness to them or his continuous presence.

5.2.4.7 Awareness of God's grace/forgiveness

Chuck, George and Kari felt that they had a deeper understanding of the grace and forgiveness of God as a result of their experiences. Kari expressed her thankfulness for this forgiveness repeatedly.

5.2.4.8 Increase in religious affections

There were various comments given about sensing or feeling things as a result of these experiences. Betty said she felt a sense of freedom, peace and joy. Frieda also experiences peace and joy. Anna says she regularly feels joy and ecstasy. Kari says she feels peace. Jenny feels hope. Evan also feels joy. These feelings or senses align with some of the religious affections discussed in the literature review.

Not everyone responded in the same way to their experiences, but each one shared some type of long-term change in their life that they could identify. According to each person, God did something in them that made a difference in their own assessment of their life as a Christian. For some, it was a radical change of direction in their lives that could be identified by everyone around them. For others, it was a change of attitude that was more subtle, and yet very real, affecting their relationships with others, their involvement in spiritual things, or, on a more internal level, the manner in which they continually evaluate and adjust their own spiritual health and relationship with God.

5.2.5 Primary thread three: The possible influences

The name of this thread is "The *possible* influences" because it would be impossible to know everything in a person's life that led to an experience at a point in time, especially a spiritual experience. Often, the interviewees themselves could not identify what, if anything, influenced or prepared them for their experience. In these cases I looked for clues within their stories and from other parts of our conversations. I asked about the spiritual activities they were practicing around the time of their reported experience to see if there were any patterns.

I have attempted to identify those things that may have acted as means of grace in the participants' lives.

One possible influence that was related by every participant was regular church attendance. Every person said they attended church at least once on Sundays, and sometimes more, on Sunday evening or during the week. Those whose experiences happened during their time at Christian universities had multiple chapel services during the week in addition to church attendance. Several of the means of grace presented in the literature review are present in an "average" Wesleyan church service, including hearing Scripture read or expounded, corporate and individual prayer, involvement in Christian community, singing spiritual songs, and the Lord's Supper. Unless it was mentioned specifically, I won't repeat these things for every participant.

5.2.6 Influences: Secondary threads

The following secondary threads will present the specific activities and possible influences found in the stories. Rather than relating each story separately, I will simply present the secondary threads and describe how they appeared in the participants' interviews. These threads include 1) Personal Bible reading/Christian literature, 2) Prayer, 3) Christian community, 4) Music, 5) Involvement in Ministry, 6) Sermons, 7) Holy Spirit, and 8) Other.

5.2.6.1 Personal Bible reading/Christian literature

Nine of the eleven participants said that they were regularly reading the Bible before their transformational experience. Evan said that he read the entire Bible six or seven times prior to his experience. Most did not necessarily recognize this activity as a specific influence on their experience; it was just reported as something they have regularly done as Christians. Anna, however, specifically said that she was "searching the Scriptures" and reading Christian literature when she experienced a transformation. She expected to find answers there. I asked Ian if there was anything special happening at his church around the time he had his second, emotional experience. He said, "No, it's just in my own life and *in my studies* [emphasis added], the Lord just kept saying, 'Ian, it's time.'" Ian also mentioned that the church he was attending at the time had always been a "solid, Scripture-based church." Ian places a high value on Scripture, referring several times in his interview to his study of it and the fact that his church has, throughout his experience, been scripturally sound.

5.2.6.2 Prayer

Eight people talked about either personal or corporate prayer. When thinking about what was happening in her church before her experience of transformation, Anna mentioned a time of intentional corporate prayer for revival in the church. She said, "And the Lord started opening up things […] We had a spirit of revival for about a year, people getting saved." She didn't say the word "prayer" specifically in her transformation story, but as she was searching the Scriptures, she remembered "kneeling at my couch in my home and saying, 'Lord, everything.'" This was a prayer of consecration. Three people said they pray continuously, using the terms "conversational prayer," "constant prayer," and "personal prayer all the time." Monica personally prays daily and reports a focus in her church of community prayer for each other, which may involve gathering around a person and "laying hands" on the person while praying for them. They also practice anointing and prayer for healing. Donald said, while he was in the hospital and confined at home for 18 months, he spent a lot of time in meditation and prayer. Jenny says she prays daily and writes her prayers in her journal. Chuck, at the time of his transformational experience, was leading a weekly prayer and discipleship group.

5.2.6.3 Christian community

The importance of community was mentioned by seven respondents. Chuck said that, although he couldn't identify a specific influence on his experience, "I just think it was God's people meeting in God's place worshiping God in unity." He also talked about his discipleship group as an important part of his continuing spiritual formation. He recalled an earlier experience in church that he said "was very formative in giving me a picture of what church is." The church Chuck attended as a teenager was intentional about including people of different ages, backgrounds, and experiences in leadership during worship services. He said, "The unity of believers and the recognition of all parts of the church being vital for worship in spirit and truth to happen was just such a key thing in helping me grow."

Other participants who noted the involvement of community in their stories include Betty, who recalled that, immediately prior to her experiencing "the transforming love of Christ," the people attending the service were separated into small discussion groups after the main speaker finished. During that time, she had the opportunity to share with others and to hear from them.

Donald and Jenny both felt the love of God communicated through their church communities as they were cared for in times of illness. Monica also related an experience that happened before her story of transformation, in which the church prayed for her for three years for a chronic condition. The condition went into remission, and Monica said, “I do think those continued prayers throughout the years were the reason for it.”

In addition to being cared for by his church community during difficult times with his health, Donald said he “felt like he belonged” when he was given a position in the church as librarian.

Ian feels that sanctification is dependent on Christian community. He said, “You’ve got to have a body of believers and you’ve got to have that time together. …What I might experience over here might help someone else, and you can’t do that if you’re still in that little box over there. So you need those connections; you need that time together.” When Ian had his crisis moment, he did not go through it alone; he sought support from his pastor, the representative of his church community.

Evan’s experience came about because of friends who repeatedly invited him to church, even picking him up and taking him with them to church. Those friendships, combined with the personal mentorship of his pastor, resulted in his transformation.

All of the other participants also talked about the community they experience in their church being important to them. They did not, however, talk about it in relation to their transformational experience, so I have not reported it here.

5.2.6.4 Music

Music was discussed often in the interviews, usually in relation to corporate worship. In this thread, however, I will limit my comments to the respondents’ memories of participating in music prior to the time of their transformational experience.

Betty was studying music at university when she had her transformational experience. She says, “There have been many transformative experiences because I am a musician. …The worship through music has always been powerful to me.” One of those experiences happened when the choir she was a part of sang Mendelssohn’s “Holy, Holy, Holy” antiphonally. She said, “It just pinged across this huge sanctuary. I thought I was in heaven. …It just washed over me with, oh! Incredible joy!”

Anna, as noted previously, remembered the song, “Whatever it Takes” when she had her transformational experience, and she still considers it to be the expression of her continuing commitment.

Frieda, before her “initial sanctification” experience, volunteered at a yearly family camp, where she loved to be a part of the worship in song. She said, “There’s just something about being in God’s house with God’s people and worshiping that—it’s *my* voice, *my* instrument that is worshiping him. …It’s that I get to freely be there and worship God and to worship him with my *whole* body.” When she was in college, she was regularly listening to secular rock music on the radio. She said, “There was a time I was in school and all I had was a little radio, and I was starting to listen to Queen and other hard rock and…I knew a lot of the words to a lot of the songs. But there was a point when the Lord said, ‘Leave it. Quit listening to it.’ So, after about 1978, the main thing that I listened to was Christian music.”

Part of George’s growth as a Christian and especially as a worship leader was a realization of the importance of the lyrics in the music he sang. He said, “As I got older and my faith progressed, I got to where I’d listen a lot closer to the lyrics than maybe I would have as a teen. And that’s when music started really impacting me more, as far as worship music.” He started to see Scripture references in some of the worship songs, and that led him to read the Bible more. The resulting broader knowledge of Scripture prompted him to be more careful about choosing music for use in the church. He said that previously he did not like most hymns, because they were boring to him. But, as he started to give attention to the words, he realized that they “transcend generations” and have a “good foundation.” He said that the worship team sometimes wants to know why he chose a hymn, but when they look back, they say, “We’re glad we did that because that touched all of us.”

Jenny and Monica have both felt strengthened and comforted by music. Monica recalls a time in college when she was struggling academically and felt comforted by a song sung in church. She said, “There was a specific song and actually, one of the members of the praise team, he gave his own little testimony before the song, and that really spoke to me when he spoke. And then, just the lyrics of the song, it was really comforting and connecting like it was really placed there. It wasn’t just a coincidence.”

5.2.6.5 Involvement in ministry

This thread refers to the activities the respondents were involved in that could be considered ministry. This is not referring to professional ministry, as in being a pastor or minister of the church. None of the participants were ordained ministers or pastors at the time of their transformational experience. Some of them were, however, involved in lay ministries either through their church or in their community.

Four of the participants were involved in the music ministry of their church at some level. Some were leaders, and others were part of a team.

Monica was involved in many of the same things before her transformational experience as after, including children's ministry and the Gideons, but her attitude toward these ministries changed from what she felt was an obligation to a calling.

Between the two parts of his transformative experience, Ian was involved in church leadership as the vice chairman of the board as well as other positions. He said, "I've served every functioning role in the church other than secretary and treasurer." He was also teaching adult Sunday school classes.

Donald, as mentioned before, was given a position as librarian in his church. He keeps a small library of books and other resources for church members to use. He is also a part of a ministry sponsored by the church that reaches out to the community, doing things like organizing events to help provide needed supplies for homeless shelters and school supplies for children in need.

5.2.6.6 Sermons

Four people mentioned the sermons they heard in church as being important to them. Both Evan and Ian indicated that the primary thing they look forward to in coming to church is the sermons. Donald said his pastor's sermons have "reached me on more than one occasion." When Anna recounted the time in which her church experienced a "spirit of revival," she included preaching in the things that she thought probably influenced her, saying, "I'm sure that during that time… the worship, the singing, the preaching, the testimonies, all of that fed my soul, and spoke to me."

5.2.6.7 Holy Spirit

Four people specifically mentioned the Holy Spirit working in their lives in relation to their experience of transformation. George said, “I don’t think the George that I used to be years and years ago would feel about people the same way the George now feels about them. If God and the Holy Spirit hadn’t been doing more work in my life, if he hadn’t been taking over more stuff and there were times that, you know, if it was up to me, I would’ve done things very differently.” Kari said, “I think God—his Spirit was just working on me all the time.” Chuck said, “I think that moment at [my university] was one where the Holy Spirit took the veil away. He took away the pretense.” When Frieda talked about loving to go to the family camp, she said, “The Spirit of the Lord was there so deep that I longed to go every year.” Betty, in her continuing transformation stories, said it was the Holy Spirit who was speaking to her.

Others spoke of feeling or hearing the Holy Spirit at times in their lives, but these were the only ones who explicitly connected the working of the Holy Spirit to their stories of transformation.

5.2.6.8 Other

This thread reports on two participants who mentioned possible influences that were unique to their story. First was Kari, who talked about the influence of her mother, who rededicated her life when Kari was 21 years old. Kari said, “She said her main sin was not forgiving people when they had hurt her. So, she knew she needed to settle that. And from then on she did. She was a wonderful person.” The other unique event that was mentioned was Monica’s baptism. She linked her “adult decision” to join the church and be baptized to the events that were transformational for her.

These possible influences were gleaned from direct statements as well as statements the participants made about their activities and spiritual involvement leading up to the time of their transformational experiences.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter represents Osmer’s “descriptive-empirical” task. I have shared, in their own words, the experiences of my eleven participants. To begin to make sense out of what was shared with me, I also began the first stages of analysis by grouping the stories under various categories. These eleven people’s stories have revealed experiences in which they believe

God has entered into their lives and effected a transformation. The stories ranged from dramatic, singular events that could be identified as a "crisis" moment to seemingly unremarkable personal decisions that were remembered as life-changing. These people, with similar backgrounds and church affiliation, experienced spiritual transformation each in their own individual way, and yet, threads of similar colors can be seen running through their stories. In all cases, the participants professed a belief that God is active in their individual lives, changing them for the better.

In the next two chapters, I will examine the question posed by Osmer, "Why is this going on?" We can hear or read the stories, and we can put them into categories and even point out similarities and differences. However, these steps do not answer the question of why such experiences have happened to these people or offer a broader view of what they mean. By examining the stories in dialogue with theology and other disciplines, I will attempt to make sense of what is happening on a human level as well as a theological level.

6 Multidisciplinary Sense-Making

Now that the stories have been pulled apart in various ways, it is time to look at what they could mean. To continue with the metaphor of a tapestry, in this chapter and the following chapter I will use the threads that I pulled out of the stories woven by my participants, and I will weave those threads together with threads from various disciplines into a narrative that adds understanding to these lived experiences. Although each thread is important by itself and is also important when grouped with like threads, a tapestry is not made of only one color, nor can we see what picture the tapestry presents by looking at the separate piles of threads. They must be woven together for the meaning to emerge. At different places in the overall picture, certain colors will be more prominent, but without the supporting colors, there would be no picture. Ideally, the picture that emerges will increase our understanding of the phenomenon of spiritual transformation as it relates to corporate worship.

This step in the process of finding meaning from the data is the interpretive task, the second of Osmer's four key tasks of practical theology.[317] Interpretation, according to Wolcott, is derived "from our efforts at sense-making, a human activity that includes intuition, past experience, emotion…Interpretation invites the reflection, the pondering, of data in terms of what people make of them."[318] The purpose of this chapter is to continue the process of interpretation, or "sense-making" of the data as it has been presented. Up to this point, I have looked at what happened, according to my participants, and I have categorized the various types of experiences. Now the task is, as Osmer says, to "explain why certain actions and patterns are taking place."[319] A central part of my research question is an attempt to answer the "why" question. Is there evidence of a connection between worship practices and spiritual transformation? The question is not satisfactorily answered by a blanket assertion of a connection based on theological tradition or assumption. The human sciences offer some insight into how practices shape experience, thus I have turned to some of these perspectives to add input into my interpretation. I have chosen to include insights from psychology, social anthropology, and neuroscience for the ways in which they look for the causes of human experience. My intention is not to offer an in-depth study of transformation from other disciplinary perspectives, but to make connections between research done in these areas, theology, and my participants' stories, recognizing that "many disciplines are needed to

[317] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 11.
[318] Wolcott, *Writing Up Qualitative Research*, 30.
[319] Osmer, "Practical Theology: A Current International Perspective," 2.

comprehend systems nestled within systems and problems that are multidimensional."[320] The perspectives from these fields of study will aid in understanding these stories in two ways. First, they offer confirmation that people do experience transformational events that change their lives in ways similar to what my participants related. Second, they offer insights into mental and physical processes that seem to either contribute to or confirm the experience of transformation to individuals. These insights from science need not detract from the reported spiritual and theological understanding of my participants, but they do add a layer of understanding of the human processes that play a part in spiritual experiences, which will help me to analyze what may have contributed to my participants' stories.

I have chosen authors from three particular fields of study for this chapter, consulting one study in each field. These three studies were chosen because of the relevance of their projects to the question of a connection between practices and spiritually transformative experiences. For psychology, I have chosen a study done by William Miller and Janet C'de Baca regarding what they called "Quantum Change." For social anthropology, T. M. Luhrmann studied the interactions between people who believe in "invisible others" and their social groups, including churches. Finally, Mark Mann reports on processes in the human brain related to ritual practices. To derive meaning only from my own perspective as a Wesleyan theologian would be to ignore relevant input from experts in other areas. These perspectives from other disciplines will help to fill in some of the places in the tapestry that need an additional color to complete the picture.

6.1 Quantum change

Transformational experiences are not limited to Christians or even to a broad category of people with some sort of spiritual understanding. The following psychological investigation was conducted with a wide variety of people, including people of various types of spiritual faith, as well as those who reported no spiritual beliefs. The findings of this study bear a striking resemblance to my participants' stories.

In 1989, psychologists William Miller and Janet C'de Baca began to research a phenomenon which they ultimately called "quantum change," in which people reported remarkable experiences, for which they had no explanation, that changed their lives. In Miller's and C'de Baca's experience, behavioral science has not offered an explanation or even a name for this

[320] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 164.

type of phenomenon, despite it being a prominent theme in art and literature throughout history.

Prior to beginning their study, Miller and C'de Baca spent two years "developing perspectives on whether quantum change is a distinct phenomenon and, if so, how it might be defined and measured."[321] In order to recruit participants, they defined two criteria: the experiences must have been "relatively sudden, discrete shifts, differing subjectively from ordinary change," and "profound," meaning the participants must have experienced "enduring changes in a broad range of behaviors and attributes…which had lasted for at least 2 months."[322]

Participants for the study were recruited through an article in the newspaper in Albuquerque, New Mexico. There were 89 respondents, and 55 people were eventually included in the study. The methodology included semi-structured interviews, followed by a questionnaire "designed to obtain further details regarding interviewees' subjective experiences." Based on biographical stories of quantum changes which emphasize a "shift in value structures," the participants' value priorities before and after their experiences were measured using an assessment based on the methodology designed by Rokeach. Other measurement tools included a "Life Experience Survey" regarding events that happened during the year prior to the experience, and the "Religious Background and Beliefs Scale" by Tonigan and Miller. Finally, the participants' personalities were studied, using Tellegen's absorption sale, a locus of control scale, and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.[323]

Although many of the stories that were shared in this study described a religious experience, that was not what prompted the study nor was it what the researchers asked for when they sought participants. They said, "Quantum changes frequently are not described in religious terms, nor do they usually lead to committed involvement in organized religion. Although they overlap, quantum change is a much larger phenomenon than religious conversion."[324] Not only were the stories Miller and C'de Baca collected not exclusively about religious

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[321] William R. Miller and Janet C'de Baca, "Quantum Change: Toward a Psychology of Transformation," in *Can Personality Change?: Meeting: 100th Annual Convention: Papers*, ed. Todd F. Heatherton and Joel L. E. Weinberger (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1994), 257.

[322] Ibid., 258.

[323] Ibid., 258–59.

[324] William R. Miller and Janet C'de Baca, *Quantum Change: When Epiphanies and Sudden Insights Transform Ordinary Lives* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001), 7.

conversion, they were not all understood by those who experienced them to have a religious component.

Describing the phenomenon as they came to see it through their research, Miller and C'de Baca describe quantum change as a "personal transformation" marked by four adjectives: "vivid, surprising, benevolent, and enduring." To explain it further, they say it is "vivid in the sense that there is an identifiable, distinctive, memorable experience during which the transformation occurred, or at least began." Secondly, quantum changes are surprising, in that they "often occur in the absence of any salient external event." A third quality of these experiences is that they have a "profoundly benevolent quality." And finally, the experiences they studied seem to change people permanently.[325] They added, "These are qualities that drew our attention precisely because these experiences are so different from the ways in which people ordinarily change."[326] The similarities between Miller and C'de Baca's quantum change experiences and those shared by my participants are striking. Many of my participants remembered their stories with vivid detail, even when the experience had happened many years before our conversation. In my participants' stories, almost all of them had some element of surprise, or at least an unexpected outcome. The experiences resulted in positive internal and/or external changes in the life of the person. Finally, the effects of the experiences were enduring, being felt long after the events.

Another similarity between the stories in my study and Miller and C'de Baca's stories is that they could be separated into two types—they called the two categories "insights and epiphanies."[327] I identified a similar set of two types of experiences, which I called "seeking" and "surprise." The first type, "insightful quantum change," is described by Miller and C'de Baca in this way: "Insightful quantum changes have a quality of growing out of life experiences. Although they occur in salient, identifiable, memorable moments, they tend to follow from the person's development rather than being an intrusion into it."[328] They also point out that this type of quantum change is more than just a cognitive decision. They say, "This quantum kind of insight involves the whole person—thoughts, actions, emotions, and spirit—and in some ways represents a change in the personal sense of self."[329] This seems to

[325] Ibid., 4–5.
[326] Ibid., 18.
[327] Ibid., 10.
[328] Ibid., 18–19.
[329] Ibid., 39.

correlate with those people in my study who recognized a need in their life and were seeking to make a change or to find answers. Although they were seeking change, the experiences they had were not always predictable in what occurred or how it happened. Their searching resulted in identifiable events that produced enduring changes in their lives. An example of this is George, who was seeking wisdom from God regarding how to deal with his worship team. The unexpected answer he found was that the problem was in him, not in his team. The result was a life-changing insight about himself and a change to his own attitude. The memory of the event and its ongoing result were very clear to him.

The other category of quantum change was what Miller and C'de Baca labeled "epiphanies," describing them as mystical. They say that these types of transformational experiences

> …are experienced as quite out of the ordinary, qualitatively different from insightful turning points. …With the mystical type of quantum change…the person knows immediately that something major has happened and that life will never be the same again. There is no question about it, and some would say there was even no choice about it.[330]

Those in my study who had surprising experiences reported similar responses to what happened to them. Chuck felt like he was confronted with a choice, and he could not ignore it. Ian suddenly began to cry while he was driving his car, and felt compelled to go tell his pastor what was happening. These people's way of conducting their lives was disrupted, and they were changed from that point onward.

Some other aspects of the experiences studied by Miller and C'de Baca are also reflected in my participants' stories. Miller and C'de Baca say that both types of quantum change, insights and epiphanies, result in an enduring sense of peace, as well as lasting change in a person's life, perceptions of the world, and relationships. Among my participants, both Betty and Kari mentioned an enduring sense of peace that they remember being part of the experience. Three others, Frieda, Monica, and Jenny reported an enduring sense of peace when relating later experiences in their lives. Five people reported a significant change in how they perceived and interacted with other people. In Miller and C'de Baca's study, these changes were not limited to people who experienced what they believed to be a spiritual change. One man said, "It was like this cloud just lifted, like this calm and serenity settled in." This man made a point of not being a religious person. He said, "I understand a lot of

[330] Ibid., 20.

people say they go through dramatic changes with religious connotations. That wasn't really the case with me."[331]

It is noteworthy that such similar experiences as were shared in my study were found by these psychologists who did not set out to study religious transformation. As fascinating as the stories from Miller and C'de Baca are on their own, the similarities between the stories they gathered and my own research are even more remarkable. Miller and C'de Baca, however, are unable to offer a definitive explanation from psychology about why these experiences happened. The question posed by Osmer, "Why is this going on?" remains unanswered. As they point out, they can only offer *possible* explanations. Miller and C'de Baca offer five perspectives on the phenomenon that, from their experience as psychologists, could explain quantum change experiences. The terms they used are: "1. Breaking point 2. Deep discrepancy 3. Personal maturation 4. Particular person 5. Sacred encounter."[332]

The first type of change, the "breaking point," could occur when a person is no longer able or willing to continue living in their current state. Miller and C'de Baca describe it as "a point of desperation, a breaking point where 'something has to give'—and it does."[333] The second type, "deep discrepancy," occurs when "something tells us that a change is needed." Miller and C'de Baca suggest that the discrepancy may lie in the unconscious realm, explaining, "Perhaps quantum change is some sort of adjustment or problem-solving process that goes on at a subconscious level, presenting its results only as a finished product."[334] The third possibility, "personal maturation," relates to Fowler's levels of personal faith development, based on Kohlberg's moral stages. The idea here is that there is a "sudden maturation," perhaps after a time of seeking.[335] The fourth type of change, "particular person," says that this type of change may occur more readily in people of a certain "type," particularly people who are highly intuitive as measured by the Myers-Briggs inventory, which could make it easier for them to respond to "extra-sensory" stimuli.[336] And, finally, Miller and C'de Baca say that quantum change could be the result of a "sacred encounter." This possibility was expressed by a large number of their participants and, as expected, by all of mine. Miller and C'de Baca say, "The clear sense of being in the presence of some holy Other was reported by

[331] Ibid., 59.
[332] Ibid., 156.
[333] Ibid., 157.
[334] Ibid., 165.
[335] Ibid., 166–68.
[336] Ibid., 170.

most of those with epiphanies, but also by 42% of those with insightful quantum changes."[337] Unfortunately, they did not publish the breakdown of how many of their 55 interviewees had "epiphanies" versus "insightful" changes. Even without this information, the point they were making is notable: a significant number of people in their study reported feeling the presence of a "holy Other." It should be noted that the "holy Other" mentioned here does not always reflect a Christian understanding. Additionally, although the spiritual dimension of these experiences is the way many of the respondents understood their stories, as Miller and C'de Baca point out, there is no way to determine that assertion scientifically.

Regarding those who identified their experience as religious, Miller and C'de Baca raise the question: if this is really what happened, why do some people receive this type of experience and others don't? They reference one of their participants' stories to offer a possible answer to that question. One possible resolution to the "Why me?" dilemma is that God did not, in fact, single the person out for a blessing. The authors report, "Don's story …resembles several others in his sense that the divine is always present, always seeking us and desiring relationship. The difference, then, may be in being receptive, in being where we can be open to what is already and always there."[338]The operative word used here is "receptive." Perhaps these "sacred encounters" are available to anyone, but some people are more open to them than others.

To connect these possible explanations to my study, I can say that any of these possibilities except the first one, "breaking point," could possibly be applied to my participants. In my small number of interviews, the breaking point situation was not voiced. But, as Miller and C'de Baca said, in psychological terms, all of these explanations are only possibilities.

Miller and C'de Baca's project is a fascinating study of transformational experiences from a psychological perspective, confirming that these types of experiences are real and identifiable. However, in spite of all of their processes of analyzing what they found, they could not give a definitive answer from psychology as to how and why people have these types of dramatic transformational experiences. This perspective is relevant to my study because it confirms the "humanness" of these types of experiences, but it also indicates that there is no way to confirm the assertion that these experiences were due to unseen spiritual

[337] Ibid., 173.
[338] Ibid., 175.

forces. This inability to fully explain what happened in psychological terms can be viewed as an "argument from silence," leaving room for an actual spiritual dimension beyond human understanding. The next section will turn to social anthropology, focusing on the understanding by my participants and a significant number of the people Miller and C'de Baca studied, that God or some other spiritual being was doing something in them. The next author, T. M. Luhrmann, proposes an answer to the question, "What enables people to believe that an unseen person is interacting with them?" In addition to the experiences themselves, this section will include how the practices of the church influence these experiences.

6.2 Experiencing God as "real"

All of my participants had experiences that they connected with their Christian faith, and they all felt like they received some kind of direction from God. Luhrmann addresses this phenomenon in her book, *How God Becomes Real: Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others.* Coming from a social-anthropological perspective, she describes how people of different religions or faiths interact with "invisible others." Luhrmann says this about faith in these invisible others:

> Faith is about the mind. It is about the ontological attitude people take toward what must be imagined—not because gods and spirits are necessarily imaginary, but because they cannot be known with the senses, and people of faith must allow those invisible others to feel alive to them.[339]

Luhrmann introduces some ways to look at religious experience that offer insight into the possible processes contributing to the experiences of my participants. These processes are grounded in the religious practices of the people who claim to have had spiritually transformational experiences.

Luhrmann proposes that the way that people of faith come to understand the realness of the invisible other is by choosing to participate in what she calls a "faith frame." This frame, she says, "defines the faith with its rules and assumptions. Someone must decide deliberately to enter in and engage."[340] According to her, it is this engagement with the faith frame's

[339] T. M. Luhrmann, *How God Becomes Real: Kindling the Presence of Invisible Others* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022), 79.
[340] Ibid., 56.

assumptions that teaches the participant the language and practices that give them the conviction that the invisible exists.

Through the faith frame, there is a commitment to something that is believed to be real, but cannot be grasped by human senses. Luhrmann says, "These are quasi-sensory moments. People speak of seeing, hearing, and feeling, but they neither see, hear, nor feel in an ordinary way."[341] She even mentions the "old Christian tradition," which I have noted in Wesley's language, of the "spiritual senses," which she speaks of as "blurring the lines" between imagination and physical human senses.[342] Ultimately, for my participants, they obviously understand God to be real. God, to them, is, as Luhrmann says, "felt to be present, responsive, and engaged."[343] Luhrmann focuses on how people come to this understanding from her point of view as a social anthropologist.

Luhrmann proposes an idea she calls "kindling," using the metaphor of lighting a fire. She says, "Much of what I describe involves microprocesses of attention, ways of using the mind so that the invisible other can be grasped—they are small events, like the twigs and tinder from which a great fire can be lit, that shape where and how the fire burns."[344] Faith, and especially the process of making the invisible real, involves learning through exposure to and participation in a particular "socially shaped, locally specific" faith frame, built by the "microprocesses of attention" —those things to which the person is exposed repeatedly. While these exposures may happen with or without the person intentionally participating, for God to become real to the person, they must "buy in" to the resulting faith frame. The faith frame for Wesleyans in North Carolina is specific to those persons' nationality, their local social culture, their denominational stance, and their specific family background and local church experience. While my participants had differences in their personal histories, their faith frame is, in most aspects, very similar. The repeated language, actions, teachings, patterns of worship, prayer, and so forth, are examples of what Luhrmann calls "acts of real-making" that "kindle divine presence for a person of faith by using the mind to shift attention from the world as it is to the world as it should be, as understood within that faith." She argues that this kindling process makes invisible others "feel real" to people, which changes

[341] Ibid., 82.
[342] Ibid., 76.
[343] Ibid., 80.
[344] Ibid., x–xi.

them, and, "The change becomes a powerful motivation for their faith."[345] In Luhrmann's view, the answer to the question of why my participants experienced a change that they attributed to God working in their lives is that they have, in her words, decided deliberately to enter in and engage with this faith frame, and they have been taught by its presuppositions, which produces faith. One aspect of my participants' stories that was common to all of them was regular, at least weekly, attendance at worship services. According to Luhrmann, the "kindling" experienced during these rituals of worship develop a "mode of thinking and interpreting"[346] that gives them the continued understanding that God is not only real, but that he is involved with them personally.

Similarly to Miller and C'de Baca, Luhrmann observed that not everyone had the types of spiritual experiences she observed, not even everyone who sought such experiences. She answers this question of why some people have these experiences and not others with the idea of "talent and training."

"Talent," in Luhrmann's view, is an innate trait. It resembles Miller and C'de Baca's idea that some people are simply more intuitive and/or more receptive than others. Luhrmann refers to the Tellegen Absorption Scale, which she used in her research, which was also used by Miller and C'de Baca. Absorption, Luhrmann says, "is the capacity to focus in on the mind's object—what humans imagine or see around them—and to allow that focus to increase while diminishing one's attention to the myriad of everyday distractions that accompany the management of normal life."[347] She says that, in her research, people who score highly on this scale are six times more likely to have experienced what they felt was direct contact with the supernatural, be it God or something else, than people who scored lower on that scale.[348] This suggests that some people, without working for it, are simply "wired" to have these types of experiences.

"Training," on the other hand, is the idea that the inner senses can be cultivated. Inner sense cultivation, Luhrmann says, "is the deliberate, repeated use of inner visual representation and other inner sensory experience." Luhrmann claims that deliberately cultivating the inner senses can produce the same effect as those who score highly in absorption—the person

[345] Ibid., 11.
[346] Ibid., 21.
[347] Ibid., 70.
[348] Ibid., 72.

becomes more likely to have experiences in which they feel more connected to an invisible other. For people of faith, the form of sense cultivation Luhrmann cites is prayer.[349] Prayer was high on the list of practices in which my participants reported regular participation.

Talent and training are summed up by Luhrmann in this statement:

> Absorption and inner sense cultivation kindle the felt realness of gods and spirits. The pleasure of being caught up in the inner or outer senses, an orientation toward mind and world that allows someone to focus in on the unseen and allows the everyday world to fade—these acts of attention change the way people come to experience gods and spirits in profound ways. Gods and spirits feel more present. They feel more real. And that allows the faith frame to become more anchored in their lives. When you can sing with the angels, it is harder to lose track of the gods.[350]

In my study, Jenny still feels a profound sense of God's presence and continued faithfulness in her life after her experience of "singing with the angels." To reference her story here almost seems forced or too obvious, but her statement, "I can still hear the angels singing today" is a vivid example of an experience that anchored her faith.

Luhrmann wraps up her work in two main ideas, saying,

> So there are two analytic stories. There is, first, the faith frame, the way people reason when they think that gods and spirits matter and how that ontological attitude works in the ecology of other beliefs, thoughts, and attitudes. Then, second, there is the story of the way the feeling of realness is kindled through practices, orientations, and the training of attention."[351]

These two ideas are intertwined. A faith frame provides boundaries, or a system of faith to which a person subscribes. Kindling refers to those things that either create a faith frame or invite a person into an existing faith frame. In these ways, according to Luhrmann, people learn specific ways to experience their faith and "make God real" in their lives.

From Luhrmann's perspective, "spiritual" experiences can be explained in purely human terms. She studied people of various spiritual groups which contributed to her conclusions. The fact that people of various types of faith, even those who do not connect their spirituality to a concept of a particular god, have similar experiences, lends credence to her conclusions as to how faith or belief in unseen others is formed on a human level. As mentioned at the

[349] Ibid.
[350] Ibid., 78.
[351] Ibid., 183.

beginning of this section, Luhrmann does not intend to deny the existence of God or "invisible Others;" she is only describing how humans are enculturated to experience spirituality in specific ways. Christians of various traditions undeniably experience God differently, according to the ways in which they are formed by engagement in their tradition's practices, or faith frame. In the Wesleyan tradition, we believe God to be real, and we believe that God interacts with individuals. Luhrmann's view that people's understanding of their spiritual experiences is learned or influenced by engagement with a particular community is not incongruent with an *a priori* belief in a "real" God who interacts with people to change their lives; only that the way they understand God is taught by their faith community.

6.3 Faith and the human brain

I turn now to Mark Mann, who speaks from a Christian perspective, but whose approach is to account for the contributions of science to an understanding of human life and spirituality. Mann points out that "Scripture and traditional sources like Wesley…cannot be expected to complete the picture alone."[352] As he says, there are "contemporary resources" that can aid in our understanding of human experience. One of the sciences that Mann turns to is neuroscience, which adds another perspective to Luhrmann's ideas of the formation of a faith frame through training. Mann describes, based on neuroscience, how rituals influence humans' ability to believe myths.[353] He says that humans need to have an ordered and predictable understanding of their world. When the world is not ordered and predictable, the human brain looks for a reason or cause. Myths, he says, "fill in these gaps and provide a foundation for our presumption that reality is an ordered and meaningful whole that we can trust."[354] Myths allow us to make sense of our world. Mann is making no claim here regarding the veracity of Christian stories that could be classified as myths; he is interested in how religious rituals serve to "confirm the truth of the myth for those participating in the ritual."[355] Rather than looking for a theological explanation of Christian myths, he is looking for a scientific explanation of how people come to believe the stories of their faith. One

[352] Mann, *Perfecting Grace*, 4.

[353] Ibid., 63 Mann uses "myth" as a scientific classification of story as it is defined by neuroscientists D'Aquili and Newberg as "any story that seeks to provide an account of ultimate reality either in terms of the *efficient* causality of reality (as in creation myths) or in terms of *final* causality (as with salvation myths, those that speak of an afterlife, final judgment, etc.), not in the popular sense of a story that is not true.

[354] Ibid.

[355] Ibid., 66.

answer, according to neuroscience, is how participation in communal rituals affects the processes in the human brain.

Rituals, Mann says, "provide a communal context for the reciting and performing of myths, especially in terms of actualizing the resolution of the myth for the community that has gathered to remember and celebrate the message and truth of the myth."[356] Corporate worship, then, is the primary place for Christian stories to not only be learned, but to be repeated and even acted out on a regular basis, as in the rituals of the Lord's Supper and Baptism. The physical nature of rituals and the use of repeated physical movement, especially rhythmic movement, also plays an important part in their neurological efficacy. When performed in a group setting, rituals can activate centers in the brain that encourage feelings of unity with the people present who share in the same experience. This neural activation of the arousal and/or quiescent nervous systems produces group cohesion.[357] The experience of unity "tends to deepen the sense of the veracity of the myth and the various messages and morals embedded in it."[358] These "myths" regarding the Christian faith can be stories found in Scripture, traditions of the Church, specific doctrines, or even repeated stories of experience that make their way into the "lore" of a community of believers.

The physiological processes of the human brain affect how people experience religious practices. Mann asserts that these processes are "not explicitly voluntary, conscious, or spiritual."[359] Although the meaning humans attach to these types of activities may not be consciously acquired, by the fact that they are repeated, especially within a community of shared beliefs, creates physiological changes in the brain. He says "…those liturgies that produce powerfully confirming neurological effects and experiences have performed one of their most important purposes."[360] That purpose is to confirm the truth of the stories of faith.

Describing how religious rituals affect the human brain's ability to believe, Mann demonstrates how participation in those rituals can change a person's outlook on life, the sense of one's relationship to God, and "a decisive realignment of their sense of identity and sense of self."[361] These observations regarding the influence of religious ritual on the human

[356] Ibid., 64.
[357] Ibid., 64–65.
[358] Ibid., 65.
[359] Ibid., 68.
[360] Ibid., 66.
[361] Ibid.

brain can be viewed as similar to Luhrmann's idea of "kindling." Religious rituals are a major part of kindling the "feeling of realness…through practices, orientations, and the training of attention."[362]

Mann's research into the effects of religious rituals on the brain speaks to the ways in which my interviewees' ongoing participation in the rituals of corporate worship may have influenced their degree of openness to the stories of faith found in The Wesleyan Church. In these stories, God is expected to interact with his people on a personal level. Believers are expected to be changed, or transformed, by these experiences. Following Mann's reasoning, by participating in corporate worship over an extended period of time, the stories and expectations of the community are reinforced by the repetition, the communal nature, and the physicality of worship practices. These activities over time could produce patterns of thought that influence how people interpret their experiences based on neurological changes.

6.4 Conclusion

The connection between religious practices and the experience of spiritual transformation as understood by these scholars rests on two basic assumptions: First, there are individuals whose temperament makes them more likely to experience transformation. Second, repeated participation in rituals in the context of their community of faith and its traditions can act as "kindling" to "make God real" and confirm belief. While these hypotheses attempt to explain this connection in scientific terms, they do not rule out a God who interacts with humans and transforms them.

One of the questions posed by these researchers is, "Why did *these* people have these experiences, and not other people?" This question is relevant to my study, as I interviewed quite a small number of people relative to the total population that identify themselves as Wesleyan. The invitation to participate was extended to hundreds of people. Why did only these few people respond? Miller and C'de Baca, as well as Luhrmann, would point to the person's natural makeup. According to Miller and C'de Baca, the persons who had this type of experience may be more intuitive than others, or simply more "receptive." Luhrmann called it "talent" or "absorption." According to these views, some people are just naturally more inclined to have this type of experience. Another option, presented by Luhrmann and Mann, points to the practices and stories in which people who experience transformation are

[362] Luhrmann, *How God Becomes Real*, 183.

engaged. “Kindling” and “religious rituals,” are ways in which mental patterns may be formed, and in which people could become enculturated into a “faith frame” that would encourage members of the group to seek such experiences and to interpret their experiences as coming from God. A very real possibility is that, of the hundreds of people who heard my invitation, these were simply the ones who identified such an experience and were willing to be interviewed. The reasons for not wanting to participate could be many, and there is no feasible way to know how many Wesleyans have actually had what they identify as a spiritual experience related to corporate worship that they would call “transformational”.

In the following chapter I will turn to a theological interpretation of these transformational experiences, informed by the preceding scientific views. By avoiding the theological discussion to this point, I have attempted to separate the “non-theological” ideas about the phenomena from the “theological” ideas. There is obviously some inescapable overlap. Mann says, “There always will be an aspect of human being that eludes the inquiring eye of scientific research and transcends the scope of scientific description.”[363] Thus, the admission by Miller and C’de Baca as well as Luhrmann that they cannot deny the possibility of a spiritual explanation has been noted. Mann’s purpose, as well as mine in this section, “is to use the sciences to broaden and enhance our theological understanding of human being rather than to supplant it entirely.”[364] Thus, in the next chapter I will discuss these lived experiences in a specifically theological light, informed by a Wesleyan understanding of experience, transformation, and the means of grace. Mann says, “If Wesleyan-holiness theologians are to continue the tradition of such reliance on experience in reflecting on the nature of Christian holiness, what better place to turn to than the very sciences that have made it their task to study human experience in a disciplined and public fashion?”[365] Therefore, the findings of this “scientific” chapter will also be considered in the next chapter as an integral thread in the process of creating a complete picture of an understanding of human experience that is appropriate for Wesleyan thought in the twenty-first century.

[363] Mann, *Perfecting Grace*, 15.
[364] Ibid.
[365] Ibid., 8.

7 Theological Sense-Making

This chapter, like the previous one, will address Osmer's second task, interpretation, but from a theological perspective. Osmer says,

> The interpretive task draws on the arts and sciences to better understand and explain particular episodes, situations, and contexts. While the sagely wisdom of interpretation is open to the world and reflects on the meaning of the discernible patterns of nature and human life, it also draws on the redemptive wisdom of Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God's royal rule.[366]

The scientific perspective of the previous chapter will thus be considered in this chapter in relation to the theological perspectives on the subjects at hand.

One outcome of doing research into the lived experience of people regarding the relationship between spiritual transformation and corporate worship is to reveal the relationship of the normative theology of the Wesleyan Church with the experience of a sampling of people in the church, revealing the operant theology at work. Admittedly, the small sampling of people can only reveal a limited part of the picture of what is happening in the church. I will also compare the formal theology received from John Wesley and theologians in the Wesleyan tradition to the espoused theology of The Wesleyan Church and interpret how the inconsistencies, if any, have influenced my participants' understanding of their experiences.[367] For my project, there are two areas to investigate. The first will examine how my participants' descriptions of their experiences of spiritual transformation relate to the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition of entire sanctification. The second examines the claim in the literature that corporate worship is a locus for spiritual transformation in light of my participants' stories. Finally, I will consider the relationship between these two subjects from a Wesleyan perspective. The conclusions drawn will be driven by the theological understanding revealed in the stories and comments of my participants, in conversation with the theology expressed by The Wesleyan Church, and other theological literature on the subject. In addition, the findings from the previous chapter will be woven into the picture. Helen Cameron says, "It is…only in the conversation between voices, carefully attended to, that an authentic practical-theological insight can be disclosed."[368] By attending to the voices

[366] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 162.
[367] Cameron, *Talking about God in Practice*, 57.
[368] Ibid., 60.

of my participants along with the voices of theology and science, I will continue to look for answers to the question posed by Osmer, "Why is this going on?"[369]

7.1 Spiritually transforming experiences and the doctrine of sanctification

In Wesleyan terminology, spiritual transformation is included in the broadly-understood word, "sanctification." Mann uses the word to refer to the way that holiness is achieved–it is the process by which one achieves the goal of perfection.[370] The idea of process is also found in the most recent edition of the *Discipline of The Wesleyan Church*. I will repeat the doctrine here, broken into its various parts in order to more easily refer to various terminology used in it.

> 1. The basic understanding of the word "sanctification":
>
> We believe that sanctification is that work of the Holy Spirit by which the child of God is separated from sin unto God and is enabled to love God with all the heart and to walk in all His holy commandments blameless.
>
> 2. How it begins:
>
> Sanctification is initiated at the moment of justification and regeneration.
>
> 3. Growth:
>
> From that moment there is a gradual or progressive sanctification as the believer walks with God and daily grows in grace and in a more perfect obedience to God.
>
> 4. Crisis:
>
> This prepares for the crisis of entire sanctification which is wrought instantaneously when believers present themselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, through faith in Jesus Christ,
>
> 5. How it happens:
>
> being effected by the baptism with the Holy Spirit who cleanses the heart from all inbred sin.
>
> 6. Result:

[369] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

[370] Mann, *Perfecting Grace*, 10. Imprecise usage of language in the Wesleyan tradition often confuses the issues in discussions of sanctification. It can refer to a process, or it can refer to a "crisis" event. "Entire sanctification," "perfect love," or "Christian perfection" is the goal, whether or not it is seen as a process or an event. Even if it involves an event, the goal is not static, as continued growth is expected.

> The crisis of entire sanctification perfects the believer in love and empowers that person for effective service.
>
> 7. Continued growth:
>
> It is followed by lifelong growth in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
>
> 8. Evidence:
>
> The life of holiness continues through faith in the sanctifying blood of Christ and evidences itself by loving obedience to God's revealed will.[371]

Because the doctrine of sanctification in The Wesleyan Church has been interpreted in various ways through the years, with imprecise and often changing language, I chose to ask my participants about their transformational experiences first, and then about their understanding of sanctification if they did not address it in their first answer. My primary focus was to hear about experiences that they felt were spiritually transformational, whether or not those experiences corresponded to the official doctrine of the church or to what my participants understood about the doctrine of sanctification. This produced "messy" but enlightening conclusions.

None of my participants, even pastors and pastors' spouses, articulated their understanding of sanctification in exactly the way it is found in the *Discipline*. There were portions of their stories that could be compared to the three main points of the discipline, which are 1) the "gradual or progressive sanctification," which leads to 2) the "crisis experience of 'entire sanctification,'" followed by 3) a continuing "life of holiness." These Wesleyans *believe* in the doctrine of sanctification in that they believe that people's attitudes and motivations can be changed by the Holy Spirit to be more Christlike, and most of them expressed belief that there can be a point at which there is a crisis experience. However, their stories do not necessarily fit the prescribed mold, nor do they necessarily use the same language. All of my participants except one, Evan, were Christian believers prior to their transformational experiences, and even he grew up in church. They were all active in their churches. According to the *Discipline*, then, the sanctification process would have already begun when they were "saved." In the views of Luhrmann and Mann, they would have been influenced both socially and mentally to progress in their spiritual formation by their participation in the church before arriving at a "crisis" experience. What is missing in the scientific views

[371] Editing Committee, *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2022,* 21.

presented in the previous chapter is the action of God the Holy Spirit in the hearts of these people. Every one of my participants said that God communicated with them in some way, and that this communication was part of what changed their lives. Tom Greggs emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit as the one who communicates and reveals in the process of sanctification, saying, "It is the illuminating presence of the *Holy* Spirit which transforms the creaturely vessel into something holy and fits it for purpose."[372] Sanctification, in Wesleyan terms, is never simply an act of belief in a doctrine, or an act of self-improvement. For Wesley, the source of transformation is "the love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto them. (Rom. 5:5)"[373] Greggs adds, "…the Spirit does not impart a 'fact' or a piece of knowledge or an additional characteristic. Rather, the Spirit catches the creature up into the Spirit's own way, allowing the believer by an event of the act of the Spirit to participate in the divine way of grace."[374] These assertions regarding the work of the Holy Spirit support a claim that the transformational experiences of my participants were more than just some type of learning or enculturation. At the same time, they do not rule out learning, albeit in a Spirit-led or Spirit-assisted manner.

What is not clear is whether all of the transformational experiences reported constituted the "crisis of entire sanctification" as found in the *Discipline*. They were all "crises" of some degree. Each person remembered a discrete event that resulted in a significant change in their life. Many also described a process of growth, both before and after the experience. Some described multiple experiences, but I have reported only on those that were identified as the experience that they considered most transformational. Wesley used the metaphor of the physical birth and growth of a human being to describe justification and sanctification. He spoke of regeneration, or the new birth (cf. John 3:3) as the event that begins the sanctification process, saying that the new birth is the "gate" or the "entrance" into sanctification. He says,

> A child is born of a woman in a moment, or at least in a very short time. Afterward he gradually and slowly grows till he attains the stature of a man. In like manner a child is born of God in a short time, if not in a moment. But it is by slow degrees that he afterward grows up to the measure of the full stature of

[372] Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, 29; emphasis in original.
[373] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 179.
[374] Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, 31.

> Christ. The same relation therefore which there is between our natural birth and our growth there is also between our new birth and our sanctification.[375]

As noted in the literature review chapter on sanctification, Wesley expected this time of growth to culminate in a "crisis experience" of entire sanctification, which he also called "Christian perfection." (See section 2.2.1.1 "The process of sanctification.") His use of the word "perfect" and "perfection" has been a point of misunderstanding since he proposed the idea.

Several of the participants commented about the word "perfect." Anna said, "I would never be perfect. I won't be perfect." Ian said, "None of us is ever going to perfect in this world." These comments could be construed as a break with the Wesleyan Church's teaching of the doctrine of entire sanctification or Christian perfection. On the other hand, they could simply be indicative of the more common understanding of the word "perfect" as something that has no fault; no room for improvement. George, who was studying for ordination at the time of his interview said, "In the Wesleyan Church we talk about entire sanctification. And even when I've read some of John Wesley's stuff, I'm not sure that what people think of "entire" or, you know, "Christian perfection," …would be the same definition he had for it." The idea that "entire" or "perfect" means that there is no room for growth or that it is impossible for a person to sin or make mistakes, is not what Wesley meant, as he explained in his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*: "By perfection I mean a humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling all the tempers, words, and actions, the whole heart and the whole life. …And I do not contend for the term 'sinless.'"[376] In addition, he said, "It is not absolute. Absolute perfection belongs not to man, nor to angels, but to God alone."[377] These statements by Wesley indicate that he did not understand the word "perfect" to mean without fault or with no room for improvement.

Despite problems with the terminology, the possibility of a singular "event" that marks a transformation of the human heart to reflect "perfect" love for God and neighbor is a distinctive teaching of the holiness tradition. Wesley said,

> An instantaneous change has been wrought in some believers: None can deny this. Since that change, they enjoy perfect love; they feel this, and this alone; they *'rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks.'*

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[375] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 343.
[376] Wesley and Olson, *John Wesley's 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection'*, 216.
[377] Ibid., 247.

> Now, this is all that I mean by perfection; therefore, these are witnesses of the perfection which I preach.[378]

It is noteworthy that Wesley said "in some believers." He recognized that not everyone had the same experience. In addition, this "perfection" preached by Wesley, was never meant to imply that there would no longer be a need for further growth. Knight describes the process of growth in Wesley's view of salvation as "attainments along the way of salvation." He says that these attainments are not terminal, but each is "foundational for further growth, which builds upon and enlarges what has gone before. Because the ultimate horizon is eschatological, there is no point in the Christian life where growth is no longer possible or desirable. There is always 'more.'"[379] Thus, my participants rightly do not claim to be "perfect" in a way that leaves no room for continued growth.

The *Discipline* also, even though it describes a definite crisis experience, says that this experience will be followed by lifelong growth and a life of holiness by faith. Some of those who described a "crisis" experience that they identified as a sanctification moment, also described continuing growth and even struggle afterwards. Betty remarked that as a result of her experience she felt a great desire to please God and continued to seek for the power to do so—to *not want* the things that "were not like him." Chuck also talked about how he has to continue to make conscious decisions about his "pursuit of sanctification" in order to love Jesus more. Even Anna, who prayed a prayer of consecration, vowing to do "whatever it takes," was aware of her fallibility and need for repentance later in her life. These experiences are all congruent with the doctrine of sanctification as expressed in the *Discipline*. These people's desire to continue to make choices that evidence their love of God reflects Wesley's understanding of "perfect love" to be the ability to love God and neighbor above all else. As Chuck said, "from that day on, [there has been] the conscious choice of, …in everything that I do, am I choosing Jesus or am I choosing myself? Am I choosing to love me more or am I choosing to love Jesus more?" Chuck's "crisis" experience changed his priorities in a way that can be identified with the Wesleyan ideas of "entire sanctification," "Christian perfection," or "perfect love." Whether or not all of my participants felt that they had experienced "entire sanctification," they all experienced something that could at least be seen as part of the process of spiritual growth that is essential to the doctrine of sanctification

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[378] Ibid., 250; emphasis in original.

[379] Henry H. Knight, *Anticipating Heaven Below: Optimism of Grace from Wesley to the Pentecostals* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 19.

in The Wesleyan Church, and possibly one of the foundational "attainments" along the way that result in further growth. Greggs points out that "Even the assurance of forgiveness and of always falling back on God's grace…is a state of continual crying out to God in repentance, as opposed to a state of confidence in one's status based on some singular event."[380] In this view, the fact that my participants still understand that they are not "perfect" is a gift from the Holy Spirit, allowing them to recognize their need for more grace, more forgiveness, and more spiritual growth.

Based on these arguments, I can confirm that my participants experienced some degree of sanctification as a result of the Holy Spirit graciously "illuminating" them in some way. An integral part of this study is to seek an answer to the question of whether these people's participation in corporate worship was a factor in their transformational experiences. If so, in what way[s] did corporate worship influence their experiences? As a phenomenological researcher, I must answer this question based on the responses of my participants, in conversation with the views of the theologians and non-theological writers studied. This is the question that will be examined in the next section.

7.2 Corporate worship as a locus for transformation

A prominent idea in my literature review is that participation in the liturgy of corporate worship can and even should be spiritually transformational. The liturgy of Christian worship reveals God's glory to the worshipers, who, in turn, reflect the glory of God in their response to him, to each other, and to the world. (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18) These actions, practiced over time, should change people spiritually to become more Christlike. Constance Cherry says, "Christian worship is a *sustained* encounter with God—a journey from our place of origin (physically and spiritually), through meaningful acts of worship as a community, to transformation from having been in God's presence."[381] If this assumption is correct, it stands to reason that this connection should be found in my participants' stories. However, even though I asked them to tell me about transformational experiences related to corporate worship, few of them expressed an understanding of a clear connection between the two. Analysis of salient comments indicates that there could be general connections between their experiences of corporate worship and their transformational experiences, but they are not *direct* connections, as if a certain aspect of the liturgy, such as a song or even a sermon

[380] Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, 375.
[381] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 27; emphasis in original.

prompted the event. As Chuck so eloquently said in his interview, "I honestly think there's a grace in that, because I think that we, as humans, we want the formula, right? We want the secret sauce!" He did not believe that God has a formula or "secret sauce" that is effective for every person, nor does God work in that manner. In fact, as previously discussed, sanctification is a gift of grace administered by the Holy Spirit. Clapper reminds us, "Holiness is not a question of autonomous willing…it is 'righteousness, joy and peace *in the Holy Ghost.'*[382] If the experience comes as an answer to prayer, or if it comes as a surprise that is seemingly unconnected to one's practice of corporate worship, the God who sanctifies is free to administer the gift by his choice of place and time. As noted in chapter two, Wesley regarded certain practices, the "means of grace," to be "channels" that convey grace that leads to transformation. However, Wesley also said, "He [God] can convey his grace, either in or out of any of the means which he hath appointed."[383] Wesley recognized that practicing certain means of grace in certain ways was not a "magic formula" to appropriate the gift of sanctification, and no amount of human effort can make a person holy. Even so, he continued to assert that these practices, some of which are present in corporate worship, are a typical way in which God conveys his grace to people. They are not "normative" in the sense that God is bound by our performance of certain actions. Based on Wesley's theological assertion that God appointed the means of grace for this purpose, it is still profitable to seek an answer to the question of whether or not the practices of corporate worship may have influenced the transformational experiences of my participants in a way that reflects Wesleyan theology.

As noted previously, all of my participants attended public worship services in The Wesleyan Church on a regular basis for a significant amount of time prior to their reported transformational experiences. Luhrmann's view of the practice of regularly attending corporate worship services is that it is done *for the purpose* of producing something, as revealed in her words, "…church is about changing people's mental habits."[384] This statement is quite instrumental, meaning that, in her view, worship is undertaken *in order to* produce a result in the worshipers. This view does not coincide with the position of Christian liturgists. As an example, Marva Dawn called worship "A Royal Waste of Time," emphasizing that worship is not utilitarian, or undertaken to serve the worshiper.[385] As seen

[382] Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church*, 75; emphasis in original.
[383] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 169.
[384] Luhrmann, *How God Becomes Real*, 1.
[385] Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal "Waste" of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999).

in chapter 3, the first purpose of worship is to glorify God. However, it cannot be denied that the repeated participation in liturgy shapes people's thoughts and understanding of their faith. Nancy Ault sees this shaping process as a form of education, applying educational theory to the act of worship to explain how it can be transformational.

Ault says, "Public worship by its nature is rooted in multiple contexts that are rich in associated meaning and activity. When we participate in worship, we are learners. We have no choice. Some of what we learn will be explicit and intentional but much will be unintentional and unconscious."[386] Ault describes liturgy as the "liminal space of encounter and communication with God…sustained through the relationships engendered."[387] Drawing from the educational theory of Stephen Sterling, Ault suggests that the dimensions of learning encountered in worship include "information, formation, and transformation."[388] Her description of learning by participation in worship is similar to the thoughts of Luhrmann and Mann regarding repetition and the increased influence of stories learned in community, but in the end, there is a spiritual dimension to Ault's position that is not present in the arguments of Luhrmann and Mann. Her position is closer to Smith's ideas about habituation and repetition in the context of Christian worship. Smith says,

> Indeed, if we demonize repetition we end up abandoning rehabituation. For habituation is a kind of cognitive automation, and such automation only happens through repetition. Only through immersion in the same practices over and over can we hope for the inscription of those 'neural maps' that will reconfigure our dispositions. Quite simply, there is no formation without repetition.[389]

Smith is also quite careful to point out that *what* is repeated and *how* it is repeated are both essential for repetition in worship to be formational. Liturgy that communicates God's Story in cognitive and noncognitive ways is key. More discussion of Smith and noncognitive aspects of liturgy will be included in the next chapter.

The three dimensions of learning presented by Ault are all effected through repeated participation in the liturgy. Information is acquired as worshipers learn the facts of their faith. Repetition is key to learning that information. Referring to the second dimension of learning,

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[386] Nancy Ault, "Worship as Information, Formation, and Transformation," in *In Praise of Worship: An Exploration of Text and Practice*, ed. David Cohen and Michael Parsons (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 179.

[387] Ibid., 180.

[388] Ibid.

[389] James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Pub. Group, 2013), 182.

formation, Ault says, "Through the communication-relational dynamics inherent in worship, we are influenced as individuals and as communities. In our worship is our *becoming* the Body of Christ."[390] This view echoes Hancock, as presented in the literature review, who said, "Worship is the action by which we are made into the Body of Christ."[391] Elaborating on this point, Ault says,

> In public worship, we are given an exemplar of ethical integrity in the person of Christ. Our worship models a conception of Christian life and relationships within that life. Additionally, we learn the language with which we can articulate an ethic of justice and care. Through our liturgical praxis, we may be explicitly (or implicitly) challenged to reorder our lives.[392]

The third level of learning in Sterling's model is transformation. This is where Ault diverges from a merely educational view. She asserts, "Whereas first-order learning concerns information transfer within an accepted worldview, third-order learning requires a change in our perceptions, conceptions, and actions. …Liturgically, the challenge is our on-going conversion and transformation into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor 3:18)."[393] The fact that all of my participants described their ongoing participation in corporate worship services is an indication that they have been explicitly and implicitly learning their faith on various levels over an extended period of time. They believed the experiences they shared with me came from God, and that those experiences changed their "perceptions, conceptions, and actions." Each experience was unique, exemplifying Chuck's assertion that there is no "secret sauce" that can be applied equally to all worshipers.

In Ault's model, the ultimate level of learning, transformation, is the most difficult to both identify and predict. In her model, information and habits can be learned, but "transformational moments are a gift from God."[394] It may be possible to *encourage* learning on a transformational level that is congruent with a Wesleyan understanding of entire sanctification, but the sanctifying experience is not "produced" by the worshiper's faithful participation nor the liturgist's faithful presentation. It is not guaranteed, nor is it something that can be scientifically studied, because the conditions for it to happen are not reproducible

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[390] Ault, "Worship as Information, Formation, and Transformation," 187; emphasis added.
[391] Hancock, "Corporate Worship," 406.
[392] Ault, "Worship as Information, Formation, and Transformation," 188.
[393] Ibid., 189.
[394] Ibid., 190.

in a scientifically controlled manner. Spiritual transformation is God's gift of grace. Wesley himself said,

> We know that there is no inherent power in the words that are spoken in prayer, in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard, or the bread and wine received in the Lord's Supper; but that it is God alone who is the giver of every good gift, the author of all grace; that the whole power is of him, whereby through any of these there is any blessing conveyed to our soul.[395]

Human actions and decisions can be studied. A person can assess whether the outcome of a decision they made was what they intended. Some decisions can even result in major changes in a person's life. An extended study of a particular church's liturgy compared to the knowledge and attitudes of participants in that liturgy could possibly identify some of the specific ways in which the liturgy influences and teaches people. However, identifying the point at which God's grace was "poured into" someone's heart by the Holy Spirit, all the experiences and learning that influenced the experience, and how to classify such a transformation, is not possible to achieve with any kind of certainty. This does not mean that nothing can be understood regarding the transformational experiences of my participants. In the following section, I will return to Wesleyan theology to offer a way to understand the connection between spiritual transformation and corporate worship in light of these stories of lived experience.

7.2.1 Worship and the means of grace

In Wesleyan theology, the teaching that closely connects corporate worship and sanctification is the means of grace. According to Wesley, the means of grace are the "ordinary channels" which God uses to convey grace, including sanctifying grace. Some of the means of grace are intended to be practiced individually, but some can only be found in the practice of the liturgy in the community of believers. Wesley's list of the "instituted" or "particular" means of grace includes the following particular means that are found in corporate worship:

1. Prayer: private, family, public; consisting of deprecation, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving; extemporaneous and written.
2. Searching the scriptures by reading, meditating, hearing; attending the ministry of the word, either read or expounded.
3. The Lord's Supper.

[395] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 160.

4. Fasting, or abstinence.

5. Christian conference, which includes both the fellowship of believers and rightly ordered conversations which minister grace to hearers.[396]

This is the basis for the means that I will highlight from the interviews. With Cherry, I include music, as it is an expression of Scripture and prayer, and as it is one aspect of participation in community. I did not include fasting, as it is generally understood as a private means of grace, and it is not typically included as part of a corporate worship service. The Lord's Supper was not mentioned by my participants, so it will not be included in the discussion at this time. The means of grace that are typically included in corporate worship include ways in which God speaks to people through the liturgy as well as ways in which people respond to God. Knight says,

> For him [Wesley], the means of grace were loci for divine activity and our reaction to that activity, of God's love and forgiveness and our love, praise, and gratitude. They are means of our worship even as they are means of God's grace.[397]

In current Wesleyan doctrine, as seen in the *Discipline*, spiritual growth, or "progressive sanctification," which can also be equated with spiritual formation, leads to spiritual transformation, or "entire sanctification," which is presented as a crisis experience. Wesley encouraged people to practice the means of grace in order to grow in their relationship with God. Knight says, "Because the Christian life is constituted by a relationship with God, there is never a point in the Christian life when the means of grace are no longer necessary."[398] As noted previously, the experience of entire sanctification is not a static state; a person who experiences this gift of grace continues to grow deeper in their relationship with God.

Following are representative comments from the interviews that reflect references to specific means of grace included in corporate worship services. I did not give my participants a list to choose from, nor did I use the term "means of grace." I asked them to tell me about the

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[396] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 5. Note: Baptism is not included in Wesley's lists. According to Knight, "Although Wesley clearly thought baptism was a means of grace, he consistently omitted it from his various lists and general discussions of means of grace. The most obvious reason for these omissions is practical: baptism was a onetime initiatory event, and thus had no further role to play in the ongoing life of the Christian." (p. 178)

[397] Ibid., 44.

[398] Ibid., 15.

worship services at their church and what they look forward to when they go to church, hoping to identify those practices that they found significant to their spiritual life.

Scripture, both read and expounded

Donald, Evan, Ian, and Kari all mentioned that hearing the sermons during worship services contributed to their spiritual growth. Evan said, "I really get engaged when he [the pastor] brings the message." Kari felt that she is "enlightened every Sunday" through the preaching, saying that the sermons she hears teach her more about the Bible. No one mentioned simply hearing Scripture read during corporate worship as meaningful to them.

Prayer

Monica, Kari, and Frieda indicated that public prayer experienced during the worship services was meaningful to them. Interestingly, all three of them spoke specifically about extemporaneous corporate prayer, when the congregation prays for each other, as opposed to traditional, liturgical prayers or even extemporaneous prayers offered by a leader. Kari's comment was, "This is some of the best and the closest times, where you join together with other people, where you carry their burdens, and bring them before the Lord." This type of prayer could also be included in the next category, Christian community.

Christian conference or community

All eleven interviewees described some aspect of participation in Christian community as important to their spiritual life. Regarding personal spiritual growth prior to his reported transformational experience, Chuck said, "The unity of believers and the recognition of all parts of the church being vital for worship in spirit and truth to happen was just such a key thing in helping me grow. [It] really molded me and helped me see Jesus more clearly, through his church." Ian, focusing on the communal aspect of worship, remarked, "You've got to have a body of believers and you've got to have that time together." He said that people sharing their experiences with each other helps the community to grow spiritually. Frieda felt there is "more power" in a group of people worshiping together than one person alone. Donald felt that his church community supported him "like family," and that experience strengthened his faith and helped his spiritual growth. This is the only means of grace from the list cited above that was mentioned by all the participants.

Music

Music during corporate worship services was also significant, mentioned by nine of the eleven participants. Betty's experience is that "worship through music has always been powerful to me." Often, music was mentioned along with other aspects of corporate worship that they felt were meaningful and helpful for their spiritual health. Frieda specifically mentioned the physical and emotional aspects of singing in worship as a community that are especially meaningful for her, including how she worshiped God with her whole body when she sang. Monica, Frieda, and Jenny all recounted specific times when the music included in a church service ministered to them—bringing peace, comfort, and increased faith in God. Kari feels "lifted up" by the music in the church. She said, "It's a spiritual thing, you know, between you and God."

These people all participated in a meaningful way in some of the means of grace. I consider these comments to represent "meaningful" participation because the interviewees made the comments with no prompting or direction other than asking them about the worship services at their churches and what they looked forward to. It remains, though, that they did not recognize a connection between their regular participation in corporate worship and the transformational experiences they talked about in their stories.

7.2.2 The means of grace and The Wesleyan Church today

Although some of my participants had received theological education at colleges or universities in the Wesleyan tradition, and some were pastors when I interviewed them, none of them used the specific term "means of grace" when talking about the elements of corporate worship that they felt were most meaningful or helpful to their spiritual life. It is not a term I have personally heard regularly in The Wesleyan Church. I investigated its usage in the publicly-accessible resources offered by the church. To begin with, it is rarely mentioned in the *Discipline*. The references found in the index point to three sections. The first is number nine of eleven "basic principles" of The Wesleyan Church, which says, "Grow in the knowledge, love, and grace of God by participating in public worship, the ministry of the Word of God, the Lord's Supper, family and personal devotions, and fasting."[399] Although these are means of grace, the term is never used, although it is referenced in the index for this section. The second reference points to the rite used for reception of new members. In that

[399] Editing Committee, *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2022,* 28.

rite, it says, "All of us, whatever our age or position, stand in need of Christ's church and of those means of grace which it alone makes available."[400] Lastly, the section about the sacraments of the church says this:

> We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sacraments of the church commanded by Christ and ordained as a means of grace when received through faith. They are tokens of our profession of Christian faith and signs of God's gracious ministry toward us. By them, He works within us to quicken, strengthen, and confirm our faith.[401]

These findings are indicative of the lack of focus on the means of grace in The Wesleyan Church. Beyond the *Discipline,* the denomination publishes books and materials for teaching various subjects in the local church, through personal study, small groups, Sunday school classes, Bible studies, etc. Searching the Wesleyan Publishing House website for the term "means of grace" returned no results. Searching for categories related to "means of grace," the closest category listed was "discipleship/personal growth." There were 102 books in this category, most of which were studies of specific books of the Bible or devotional books about specific topics. After reading the descriptions by the publisher of all the books that seemed to address Christian practices, I could only find two that were related to the means of grace. They were *Soul Shaper: Becoming the Person God Wants You to Be* by Keith Drury[402], and *Awakening Grace: Spiritual Practices to Transform Your Soul* by Matt LeRoy and Jeremy Summers.[403] These books are designed for use by individuals or small groups, and thus do not focus on the elements of corporate worship as such.

Soul Shaper is described by Wesleyan Publishing House as an "accessible book, offering the wisdom of ancient disciplines in simple, practical terms that today's Christians can understand and apply."[404] Drury includes 22 spiritual disciplines, some of which are included in Wesley's traditional list of the means of grace. In the preface, Drury says, "We might call them [these spiritual disciplines] the 'means of grace.' These disciplines are practices we can do that put us in the channel of God's changing grace."[405] In the list of 22 disciplines, Scripture and prayer appear from the traditional Wesleyan means of grace that are normally

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[400] Ibid., 273.

[401] Ibid., 360–61.

[402] Keith W. Drury, *Soul Shaper: Becoming the Person God Wants You to Be* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2013).

[403] Matthew LeRoy and Jeremy Summers, *Awakening Grace: Spiritual Practices to Transform Your Soul* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Pub. House, 2012).

[404] Wesleyan Publishing House, https://finelink.com/wphstoreretail/bkbz92.html.

[405] Drury, *Soul Shaper*.

included in corporate worship.[406] In this book, written for personal use, these disciplines are understandably presented almost exclusively as personal practices. Drury mentions hearing Scripture being read aloud in a church service, but does not mention Scripture being "expounded" at all. All of the other practices, including prayer, are only discussed as individual practices.

In *Awakening Grace,* LeRoy and Summers reference the term "means of grace" more directly, saying, "Alive in these practices—these means of grace—is a power that is actively shaping, forming, and creating us anew into the likeness of Jesus, whom we pursue and are captured by." In agreement with Wesley, they say, "It is vital to understand that the power is not in the acts themselves and certainly not in our performance of them. The power is initiated through God's own presence in the process. It is his engagement with us that gives meaning to our practice."[407] This book, like Drury's, includes chapters on Scripture and prayer, but also a general chapter on worship, which emphasizes worship in community. LeRoy and Summers include in their discussion of worship the elements of Scripture, prayers, singing, communion, and baptism, thus at least mentioning everything except Christian conference from Wesley's list. Scripture and prayer, when discussed in their own separate chapters, are treated as personal disciplines. The chapter about Scripture has a small section recommending hearing it read in the context of community, but again, nothing about hearing it expounded. There is also a chapter about covenant friendship, which has a short section about its application in the broader community of the church. This practice could be an example of participation in Christian community.[408] This book uses the term "means of grace" exactly five times. The authors are not focusing on this specific terminology, but on the practices and the availability of God's grace to be found through them.

After reviewing these two books, I entered the word "worship" in the search bar of the Wesleyan Publishing House, to see if books offered by The Wesleyan Church indicated an understanding of practices found in corporate worship to be means of grace. I found only three books about worship, which are aimed at pastors and worship leaders. *Can't Wait for*

[406] Ibid. The 22 disciplines are separated into four categories: Disciplines of Abstinence, which includes fasting, silence, solitude, simplicity, rest, and secrecy; Disciplines of Action, which includes journaling, hospitality, confession, Scripture, charity, prayer, and penance; Disciplines of Relationship, which includes restitution, forgiveness, capturing thoughts, restoration, humility, purifying ambition, honesty, and peacemaking; and the final category, Discipline of Response, including simply "response."

[407] LeRoy and Summers, *Awakening Grace*, 18.

[408] Ibid., 6 The practices listed in this book are: Scripture, prayer, worship, mercy and justice, sabbath, creation care, covenant friendship, generosity, and creative expression.

Sunday: Leading Your Congregation in Authentic Worship, by Michael Walters, *The Wonder of Worship: Why We Worship the Way We Do* by Keith Drury, and *Ancient Fire: The Power of Christian Rituals in Contemporary Worship* by Ken Heer. Walters speaks of the transformational power of worship in two chapters: Chapter 2 – Foundations: Why Worship Matters, and Chapter 13 - Missions: The Transforming Power of Worship. He does not specifically reference the means of grace.[409] Drury's book serves as a historically-based explanation of worship practices. He also does not mention the means of grace.[410] Heer is the only one of the three who references the means of grace. Specifically, he points to baptism and the Lord's Supper as means of grace in chapters nine and ten, and then in chapter eleven he recommends the means as necessary for Christian leaders to maintain their personal spiritual lives. In this context Heer mentions personal study of Scripture, then quotes John Wesley's sermon on the means of grace, but does not elaborate on any of the other means from that sermon.[411]

These observations regarding what is offered directly from The Wesleyan Church about worship and the means of grace could explain why my participants did not use the term or make a connection between their experience of transformation and their participation in corporate worship. Even in the books that mention it, the term is used sparingly. The resources offered by the Wesleyan Publishing House are not academic; they are intended for use by laypeople and pastors. I do not know if the pastors of my participants ever use the term "means of grace" in their services, but it is clear that it is a rarity in the educational and devotional materials offered by the Wesleyan Publishing House. A person who attends church regularly, but has not heard the term "means of grace" and has not been taught the theological basis for their intentional practice would not be expected to use the term when describing their experiences. The lack of knowledge about a theological term does not, however, render the practices signified by the term ineffective.

7.2.3 Decline in emphasis on the means of grace

The lack of knowledge of the means of grace in The Wesleyan Church can be attributed to the prioritization and, in the past, the singular focus on Phoebe Palmer's "shorter way" to

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[409] J. M. Walters, *Can't Wait for Sunday: Leading Your Congregation in Authentic Worship*, The leading pastor series (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Pub. House, 2006).

[410] Drury, *The Wonder of Worship*.

[411] Ken Heer, *Ancient Fire: The Power of Christian Rituals in Contemporary Worship* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Pub. House, 2010).

sanctification. Staples has presented a cause-and-effect scenario of Palmer's teachings and the long-term effects her theology has had on holiness churches in North America regarding the doctrine of sanctification. An overview of Palmer's teaching is presented in the literature review. The influences of her theology, according to Staples, resulted in some negative effects that are still being felt today. In Palmer's view, to receive the gift of entire sanctification a person only needed to make a rational decision and pray a prayer of consecration based on the "the promise of God" which she based on a literal reading of Scripture. Staples says,

> No supernatural evidence, no "inward impression on the soul," no empirical fruit of the Spirit, lay across the threshold which one must cross to enter in to a state of entire sanctification. One only needed the Scriptural promise, "the altar sanctifies the gift." [Matt. 23:19] If I have brought my gift (i.e. myself) to the Altar (i.e. Christ), I know that I am *ipso facto* sanctified.[412]

This "shorter way" negated the need to practice the means of grace while waiting for the Holy Spirit to move, and it negated the need for the assurance that Wesley said the Holy Spirit would communicate to the sanctified person. This dual result of Palmer's theology is reflected in the current espoused theology of the Wesleyan Church. The two streams of influence and their ultimate result are as follows:

Faith became rationalism; belief in a proposition. The proposition that Palmer presented was that "the altar sanctifies the gift." Rather than trusting in the person of Christ and waiting for the assurance of the Holy Spirit, Palmer's faith was in the literal words of Scripture, requiring merely intellectual assent. The fact that the act of believing was the only thing necessary to testify to an internal transformation negated the need for outward evidence of the inward change, namely, an ethical life that exemplifies God's love for the world.

Sanctification became an act of the human will. Unlike Wesley's view that the Holy Spirit is free to move at any time, be it sooner or later, Palmer's teaching leads to the idea that sanctification is a result of one's own actions. Patiently waiting for the "second blessing" while practicing the means of grace became unnecessary.[413]

The result of these two ideas was disillusionment in the possibility of real change because of what could be called "presumption." When people saw professing "sanctified" believers

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[412] Staples, "John Wesley's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," 105.
[413] Ibid., 106–9.

whose lives did not display the love of God for others, the doctrine itself came into question. Knight describes this as a tension between presumption and confident expectation. Charles Wesley, John's brother, did not believe that entire sanctification could be achieved until death. Knight says of Charles's concern:

> How do we anticipate holiness as heaven below without presuming to have received what we in fact have not? How can we avoid encouraging a testimony in words that is contradicted by the testimony of the life lived, and with it the resultant undermining of the faith of others in the promise of Christian perfection? [In Charles's view], to claim full salvation at all was almost certainly evidence that one had not received it.[414]

While Palmer can be seen to be "presumptuous" regarding entire sanctification, Knight points out that it was not her intention. As he says, "She had sought Christian perfection in the prescribed way to no avail."[415] In reality, she practiced the means of grace, and she also expected there to be outward evidence of a changed life as a result of the professed experience. However, these things were unnecessary to claim entire sanctification and testify to it in public. In general practice, then, these "peripheral" ideas became less important and even ignored.

John Wesley himself had a more balanced view. He, like Charles, wanted to avoid presumption, but he had an optimistic view of the possibility of entire sanctification during one's lifetime. Knight says,

> For John Wesley, since we receive it at God's timing it can be now (and we should be by faith willing to receive it at any moment), but most likely will occur later in life. …For Wesley the emphasis is on an expectant faith waiting on God; for Palmer it is on a faithful God waiting on us.[416]

As has been shown, today's Wesleyan Church expresses its doctrine of entire sanctification in language that closely resembles Palmer's shorter way, emphasizing the "crisis of entire sanctification which is wrought instantaneously when believers present themselves as living sacrifices," reflecting the emphasis on the human will. A change from strict Palmerism is the allowance for a time of growing in grace prior to the crisis experience, and the outward evidence of "loving obedience to God's revealed will."[417] While this language is more

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[414] Knight, *Anticipating Heaven Below*, 66.
[415] Ibid.
[416] Ibid., 67.
[417] Editing Committee, *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2022*, 21.

balanced than Palmer's, it is lacking the major emphasis found in Wesley's theology of the importance of practicing the means of grace while waiting, as Knight says, with an "expectant faith…joined to a patient hope" for the Holy Spirit to work.[418]

None of my participants recognized a direct relationship between the "ordinary" practices of corporate worship and their transformational experiences. They did, however, all recognize that there are practices in corporate worship that are meaningful to them and that make them feel closer to God. In Ault's language, these people have participated in something that has resulted in learning, both explicit and unconscious. If the third level, transformational learning, has occurred, it is a gift of God's grace, possibly influenced in part by the first- and second-level learning resulting from long-term participation in corporate worship. Some of the participants were seeking a deeper spiritual experience from God, but they were doing so on their own, not in a direct way through corporate worship. Only one, Anna, fits the traditional evangelical Wesleyan idea of consecration, or intentionally offering "everything" to God, inviting him to change her. The most dramatic experience, related by Chuck, was unexpected and not consciously sought at the time of the experience.

There is another aspect of sanctification that has lost its emphasis in the Wesleyan church, and that is its communal aspect. This aspect can be seen in Chuck's transformational experience, which could be described as the Holy Spirit "falling on" or "filling" the room where he was participating in a worship service. According to Chuck, many people in that room had some kind of experience. While the experiences were personal, the Holy Spirit acted in a communal setting. The communal action of the Holy Spirit was also noted by Anna, when she described a time of "revival" in her church. She said, "In corporate worship, the Lord used us as a team to bring about a spirit that people could really find the Lord, and they felt the Spirit of the Lord." Ian's experience when he "rededicated his life" was also a corporate movement of the Holy Spirit. Ian said, "I can't now tell you who the speaker was, but it was just a big wave of emotion that came over everyone. The altars were full and I was just compelled—I had to go down." Thompson points to Wesley's own emphasis on the communal aspect of the means of grace and sanctification, saying,

> It is characteristic of the means of grace in the Wesleyan understanding that they are inherently communal in character. The quintessential expression of this idea is Wesley's statement that there is "no holiness but social holiness," an oft-

[418] Knight, *Anticipating Heaven Below*, 66.

> misunderstood phrase that is intended to refer to the way in which holiness or sanctification becomes a reality in individuals only insofar as those individuals are located in a community of faith where their practice of discipleship is grounded and carried out in company with fellow believers.[419]

The work of the Holy Spirit leading to sanctification is not intended to be only an internal, personal experience. The community of believers is essential to the processes of learning on all levels—information, formation, and transformation.

The fact that some of my participants were not seeking transformation at the time of their experiences speaks to the action of the Holy Spirit, rather than their own decision. The action of the Holy Spirit is mentioned three times in the position on sanctification found in the *Discipline.* Wesley himself, several times in his sermon on the means of grace, warned that practicing the means could not guarantee an experience of transformation, but that it is a gift of grace through the Holy Spirit. He said, "God is above all means. Have a care therefore of limiting the Almighty. He doth whatsoever and whensoever it pleaseth him. He can convey his grace, either in or out of any of the means which he hath appointed."[420] Despite this warning against trusting in the practices themselves, he still counseled people to continue participating in the means of grace.

The people I interviewed, who each experienced some degree of transformation in their life that they believe was given by God, all intentionally participated in corporate worship over a significant period of time. In so doing, they regularly participated in some of the activities that John Wesley considered to be "means of grace," or "outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace."[421] They expressed that corporate worship was a meaningful spiritual practice, in which they exercised and increased their faith and knowledge of God. Whether or not participation in corporate worship was the primary factor in their transformational experience, they could not participate in these things without being changed in some way.

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[419] Andrew C. Thompson, "The Practical Theology of the General Rules," *The Asbury Journal* 68, no. 2 (2013): 17, https://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1198&context=asburyjournal.

[420] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 169.

[421] Ibid., 159.

7.3 Conclusion

Stories have been told. Meanings have been suggested. The lived experiences of eleven people in North Carolina have been unraveled and examined in various combinations and through various lenses. Investigating the meaning of human experience is inherently difficult. It is even more difficult when the experience in question is believed to be of divine origin or influence. While the sciences can produce hypotheses based on observation and theories, it is not possible to study the spiritual realm in that way. It is possible, however, to draw some conclusions based on repeated observations of human patterns of learning, enculturation, and even the science of the human brain. The psychological, socio-anthropological, and neuroscientific views offered regarding transformational experience are not necessarily wrong. These human processes can be applied to the fact that these people participated in corporate worship over a long period of time, which effected changes in them on a physical and mental level. But, when considering spiritual experience from the perspective of belief in the reality of a God who is transcendent, these scientific views are only partial. It is, as the Apostle Paul says, that we can only "see through a glass darkly" (1 Cor 13:12, KJV) in our pursuit of knowledge. The unmeasurable piece of the final picture is the activity of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said to Nicodemus: "The wind [which can also be translated "spirit"] blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going." (John 3:8) The theological dimensions of this tapestry are woven alongside the non-theological threads because humans are not made up of only one or the other. They are intertwined to form a complete picture.

The portion of this tapestry formed by considering the theological significance of the experiences of the participants in my study has revealed understandings of the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification, experiences of corporate worship, and how Wesley's means of grace can be the thread that weaves the two pieces together. The inclusion of this connecting thread has been neglected in the teaching passed down from Palmer. Some of the assertions found in the literature review are reflected in the interviews. Others are not evidenced by the experiences of these particular people. Regarding the two primary topics, transformation and the influence of corporate worship, it is impossible to measure either the extent of the transformation experienced by these people or to what degree their participation in corporate worship influenced their experiences. To take their voices seriously, we must accept their accounts of what happened as they expressed them. Measurement cannot be the goal of a

phenomenological study. The goal is increased understanding through attending to the stories of lived experience alongside the other voices. The hermeneutical dialogue between the lived experience of eleven people, the theological and non-theological literature, the doctrine of The Wesleyan Church, my own history of research, and my experience in The Wesleyan Church has enlarged my horizons regarding these subjects and has revealed some disconnects between Wesley's views and the current practices of the Wesleyan Church. What this study has not produced is absolute clarity about these subjects. Ambiguity surrounding theological topics and personal lived experience of those topics is to be expected, and leaves room for differences. Possibilities for deeper investigation into how people in The Wesleyan Church understand their tradition and an evaluation of the practices of the church are worthy of further study in the future.

The only way I can answer the question of whether or not participation in corporate worship influenced these transformational experiences is by returning to my theological base, which says transformation, or sanctification, is a work of the Holy Spirit, in cooperation with the earnest desire, or act of consecration, by the believer. If people participate in corporate worship in order to seek the presence of God by faith, they are putting themselves in a position to receive grace. Even Miller and C'de Baca, in discussing receptivity, used the phrase "being where we can be open to what is already and always there."[422] Further, if participation in the liturgy of the church can change people in a way that is recognized by science, and if we believe that God has ordained the practices found in the liturgy to be channels of sanctifying grace through the work of the Holy Spirit, then the answer to the question of whether participation in corporate worship influences spiritual transformation has much support in both theological and scientific literature. The results of this small study revealed one thing quite clearly. The participants did not identify a direct connection between their practices of corporate worship and their transformational experiences. There were a few comments about some aspects of corporate worship services that the participants felt were either influential or part of the experience. Based on these limited findings, the insights gained from the sciences in the previous chapter have a bearing on the outcome of this chapter. There is a pattern of learning and being shaped by the liturgical practices of my participants that is consistent with the experiences of participants who were *seeking* a spiritual transformation. For the ones who had a surprising encounter, however, it appeared to

[422] Miller and C'de Baca, *Quantum Change*, 175.

be less connected to their ongoing practices of worship. It remains, however, that no one specifically connected their experience to participation in Christian practices over time. Within the parameters of this limited study, the interpretive task has done its part in providing some insight into what is going on, or not going on, in the church. The following chapter will turn to Osmer's normative task of practical theology, where the question "What ought to be going on?"[423] will be examined.

[423] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

8 Normative Discernment

Richard Osmer's third task of practical theology is normative, answering the questions, "What ought to be going on? What are we to do and be as members of the Christian community in response to the events of our shared life and world?"[424] Up to this point, I have listened to my participants' stories, and I have interpreted them with Gadamerian hermeneutical principles based on my research and experience. This chapter will delve into the area of theological and practical reflection to offer an idea of what *should* be happening, adding to the descriptive and interpretive tasks that discovered what *did* happen and *why* it happened. I do not propose to say what my participants should have experienced nor how they should have experienced it or described it. Their stories are valid as presented. The stories, however, revealed how the operant theology of most of the people I interviewed is not fully in line with the scholars from the field of liturgy and worship studies regarding the transformative effect of participating in worship, nor does it fully reflect formal Wesleyan theology or the espoused theology of The Wesleyan Church. Therefore, I will be addressing these discrepancies in this chapter.

The normative task, according to Osmer, is located in the prophetic office. As found in Scripture, the prophets of ancient Israel "announce God's word of judgment and hope."[425] To apply the action of the prophetic office to the current practical theological task involves interpreting theology and theological traditions in relation to the current state of affairs in the church. This could involve critique as well as confirmation of current thought and practices of the church. Osmer calls the prophetic office "the discernment of God's Word to the covenant people in a particular time and place."[426] It is this idea of discernment that I will follow toward some conclusions about what should be happening in The Wesleyan Church regarding the relationship between corporate worship and the doctrine of sanctification.

Osmer presents three types of theological reflection that are useful in coming to normative conclusions. They are 1) Theological Interpretation, 2) Ethical Reflection, and 3) Good Practice. For this project, I will be using a combination of the first and third types. Since Wesleyan theology and its permutations leading to the theology of today's Wesleyan church have been a major emphasis of my project, theology is a relevant starting point. However, the

[424] Ibid., 8.
[425] Ibid., 132.
[426] Ibid., 133.

discussion in this chapter regarding what should be happening in the church is deeply embedded in practice, both historical and current. Thus, both types of reflection, theological and practical, are necessary. Ethical issues, while they could be involved, have not been the primary concern of this project.

8.1 Practices Matter

According to Elaine Graham, the concrete, embodied practices that exist in the church reveal the community's operant theology. She says,

> By focusing on the reality of practice, we are able to recognize that theory and practice do not exist independently. Metaphysical principles require concrete human agency. The arena of Christian *praxis*—value-directed and value-laden action—is understood as the medium through which the Christian community embodies and enacts its fundamental vision of the Gospel.[427]

The following sections will examine this idea in relation to the two emphases of this thesis: sanctification and corporate worship. How does The Wesleyan Church of today embody and enact its fundamental vision of these two practices?

The fact that most of my participants did not connect the church's doctrine of sanctification with the practices of corporate worship suggests that they have not been exposed to teaching regarding the means of grace and/or the idea that participation in those practices could be a path toward sanctification. It does not necessarily mean that there was no connection, only that they were not aware of it. This lack of understanding is not a reflection on the people I interviewed; rather it is a reflection on the lack of emphasis found in the church regarding this aspect of Wesleyan theology. My participants' reported experiences of the practices of corporate worship, while meaningful to them, indicate that those practices were not "laden" with the Wesleyan theology of either the means of grace or sanctification, and were not presented as a possible locus for spiritual transformation. Therefore, I will now turn to an examination of, as Osmer says, what *should* be happening in The Wesleyan Church.

8.2 Practices Regarding Sanctification

Graham voices a concern regarding "the relationship between tradition and contemporary context, in particular between old and new theological images, prescriptions and norms and

[427] Elaine L. Graham, *Transforming Practice: Pastoral Theology in an Age of Uncertainty* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Pub, 2002), 7.

their respective authority in informing pastoral practice."[428] She says that one conclusion is that "such values arise from, and inform, purposeful practices."[429] This conclusion is based on the idea that the purposeful practices of the church cannot be based on any "fixed or metaphysical properties," and that "the norms of history and tradition…attain binding status only insofar as they validate current purposes."[430] This is heavily weighted toward the authority of contemporary experience and purposes over a more traditional understanding of the role of Scripture as authoritative. While that perspective does not correspond with my own view of Scripture as a normative voice, Graham's ideas of how practices, tradition, and purpose interact are nevertheless helpful.

The traditions[431] and practices of The Wesleyan Church regarding the doctrine of sanctification are not always congruent. My participants' experiences and understanding of sanctification varied. Some thought the understanding of sanctification taught as "the shorter way" was too restrictive, and they preferred to look at it as a growing process. Jenny said, "Some people think sanctification is like, this one set moment…but sanctification is not necessarily a one-time deal." George said he thinks sanctification is a "process of giving more of your life over to God" until, through growth over time, you say, "Okay, God, my life is yours, to do with it what you want." Ian said, "The interpretation of some people is you have to be perfect. …I finally threw that out the window. It's a growing process." These comments reflect a difference in these participants' understanding of the doctrine, based on their experience, from the narrow way it was taught in the preceding generation. Other participants remember a specific event that they called their 'sanctification moment,' including Kari, Chuck, and Anna. Even these people mentioned growth prior to that moment. These comments reveal that my participants who commented on the doctrine of sanctification understand it to be less restrictive than what was taught by their tradition. In current practice, they were not taught to seek sanctification by the "shorter way." In fact, most of the participants said their pastors rarely mentioned sanctification at all, so the practices of these particular churches are not strongly congruent with tradition or the stated purposes of the church.

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[428] Ibid., 138.
[429] Ibid., 140.
[430] Ibid., 141.
[431] In this chapter, when I use the word "tradition" in regard to The Wesleyan Church, it will refer to the theology and practices that were influenced by Phoebe Palmer and the culture of revivalism in the American Holiness Movement, not the older tradition originating with John Wesley.

Graham goes on to assert, "A community may see itself as the bearer of tradition only insofar as its purposeful practices disclose patterns of authentic living."[432] In Graham's language, the traditional practices experienced by my participants do not clearly "disclose patterns of authentic living" in relation to the doctrine of sanctification. A group of articles related to this subject reveal how several authors in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition viewed the practices of the church as they revealed attitudes toward the doctrines of sanctification and the means of grace near the end of the twentieth century.

In 1995, Keith Drury, a Wesleyan, delivered an address to the Christian Holiness Association titled "The Holiness Movement is Dead." The response to this address was mixed, and there were, in just a few years, various articles written in response to Drury's paper, which had been published in the *Holiness Digest*. These articles were: "Why the Holiness Movement Died" by Richard Taylor, a Nazarene; "Why the Holiness Movement is Dead" by Kenneth Collins, a United Methodist; "Which Movement Will Die: Holiness or Hubris?" by Wallace Thornton, Jr., a Conservative Nazarene; and "Reconnecting the Means to the End" by Randy Maddox, a United Methodist. The first four articles were assembled into a book published in 2005, *Counterpoint: Dialogue with Drury on the Holiness Movement.*[433] All of the authors included in the book presented ideas and positions regarding the state of the holiness movement at the beginning of the twenty-first century, covering a wide spectrum of issues, but importantly for our purposes, they all addressed the doctrine of entire sanctification. Maddox's article was not included in the book, but will be discussed briefly as it was written in response to two of the authors in the book, Drury and Taylor, who expressed similar points of view to each other. Those views are also presented here.

In his original address to the Christian Holiness Association in 1995, Drury did not say that holiness *theology* was dead, but that the holiness *movement* had died. He based his comments on his observations regarding the decline of certain practices of Wesleyan-Holiness churches in the United States, citing his grandparents' stories from the early twentieth century up until the time he wrote the paper. Two of the points he lists specifically address the issues of pastoral practice regarding the doctrine of entire sanctification. First, he writes that "boomer and buster" pastors had failed to convince the next generation of the importance of entire

[432] Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 199.

[433] Keith Drury et al., *Counterpoint: Dialogue with Drury on the Holiness Movement* (Salem, OH: Schmul Pub. Co, 2005).

sanctification. "Many holiness pastors," he says, "have opted for the much more appealing notion of optional or progressive sanctification than for such a notion as 'instantaneous,' and/or 'entire' sanctification."[434] Second, he observes, "We quit making holiness the main issue. …When the holiness movement was a movement, holiness was the main thing. Holiness was all ten of the top ten priorities."[435] Drury advocates for the "radicalism" of the former days of the holiness movement, saying of contemporary Wesleyan-Holiness churches, "We're pretty safe." He expresses hope for a new movement or a resurrected movement; one which would maintain the central theme of the availability of salvation and sanctification in its teaching and preaching.[436] Richard Taylor, in his 1999 response to Drury's article, agrees that part of the fault for the demise of the holiness movement lay with preachers who no longer clearly preached holiness. He said that modern sermons had been "taken over" by psychology and counseling, and as a result, many people in holiness churches "no longer really believe that there is an instantaneous supernatural second work of divine grace."[437] All of the contributors to the book, to varying degrees, lament the loss of the past they remember. Much of the discussion regarding the future involves ways to recover practices from the past. Each of the authors points to what they believe are "essentials" of the holiness movement that must be recovered if the movement is to live, the express teaching of the doctrine of entire sanctification being one of those essentials, and specifically, preaching that reflects Palmer's shorter way rather than a "progressive" path.

Randy Maddox wrote a lengthy article for the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* in response to both Drury's and Taylor's articles. Maddox reflected on his own and others' experience that, in his view, helped to explain how the holiness movement declined to such a state. He writes,

> For many of us it was precisely because we *had* imbibed a conviction of the importance of holiness of heart and life that we were so frustrated: we sympathized with the goal to which we were repeatedly called, but found the means typically offered for achieving it to be ineffective. In particular, we sought instantaneous entire sanctification through innumerable trips to the altar, and then puzzled over why the impact of these "experiences" so consistently drained away.[438]

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[434] Ibid., 20.
[435] Ibid.
[436] Ibid., 20–21.
[437] Ibid., 41.
[438] Randy L. Maddox, "Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, no. 2 (1998): 30, https://wtsociety.com/files/wts_journal/1998-wtj-33-1.pdf.

Maddox disagrees with the position of Drury and Taylor that the solution would involve more preaching of instantaneous sanctification, asserting that this type of preaching was, in fact, the problem that led to his own frustration. He declares, "This focus has led to a relative neglect of the equally essential dimension of spiritual growth in achieving full holiness of heart and life, and of the various means of grace that nurture this growth."[439] In this article, Maddox offers what he believes to be the crux of the issue. He claims, "The movement is reaping the results of continuing to demand that their members attain this spiritual goal while failing to provide for them the full range of the graciously-provided means for nurturing true holiness of heart and life."[440] If Maddox is correct, the key to understanding the problem with the holiness movement in general, and The Wesleyan Church in particular, is to recognize how the foundations have moved over time, and to approach the doctrine of sanctification from the same perspective that Wesley held, that is, that God intends for his people to live a life that is free from the bondage of sin in order to serve others with the love of God, and that God has provided the means to enable Christians to grow in grace *over time* towards this end. It is not that there can never be an instantaneous event that happens without an extended period of growth, as Phoebe Palmer advocated. The point is that other types of experiences, involving gradual growth, are equally valid, and should be recognized as such.

The positions of Drury/Taylor and Maddox are both valid, clearly pointing to practices that have been neglected by contemporary Wesleyan-Holiness churches. As noted by Maddox, holiness churches have neglected to offer the practices that "nurture" holiness. According to Drury and Taylor, holiness pastors have neglected to even offer the idea that holiness, or entire sanctification, is possible. These observations of what is missing from The Wesleyan Church today affirm that "practices matter." Graham remarks,

> If the normative values of the faith-community are indeed constructed in value-informed and value-directed practice, …then the normative criteria for such practical reasoning lose any fixed or metaphysical properties. The norms of history and tradition become embodied in the accrued experience of the past, and attain binding status only insofar as they validate current purposes.[441]

Again, I do not agree with Graham's rejection of "any fixed or metaphysical properties" for normative criteria. Nevertheless, her observation regarding how current practices are connected to "the accrued experience of the past" is borne out in the operant theology that is

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[439] Ibid., 31.
[440] Ibid.
[441] Graham, *Transforming Practice*, 140.

displayed by my participants' stories, especially regarding the tradition of the American Holiness Movement. The normative, official theology of The Wesleyan Church still supports a belief in the possibility of an instantaneous sanctification experience, and that possibility is validated by the experiences of some of my participants, whether before or following an extended period of growth. The practices of the contemporary church, however, do not regularly express this possibility; neither do they purposefully provide a path to sanctification through practicing the means of grace. Both Drury and Maddox have identified a disconnect between the normative and formal theology of the church and its current practices. Thus, if The Wesleyan Church deems their distinctive doctrine of sanctification to be relevant today, it needs a two-pronged approach, based on Wesley's teaching, to revitalize it. First, they need to expressly offer the optimistic possibility of spiritual transformation as a general premise, and not as a prescribed process that excludes people who experience it differently. Second, they need to intentionally promote the means of grace and provide those means that are part of corporate worship, in order to "nurture holiness" in a way that can potentially lead to a spiritually-transforming experience congruent with a Wesleyan understanding of entire sanctification.

8.3 Practices Regarding Corporate Worship

As discussed in chapter three, corporate worship is the mode of worshiping God that occurs when God's people join together to "ascribe glory to the Lord" (Psalm 29:2). I used Cherry's more comprehensive definition as a basic framework for my discussion of corporate worship in chapter three. That definition is:

> Worship is the regular, ongoing meeting of a local body of Christian disciples with the triune God, expressed in acts of corporate devotion done in partnership with one another, in order to give glory to God, bear witness to their identity as God's people, proclaim and celebrate the grand narrative of God's eternal activity, and be spiritually formed in Christlikeness and edified by the Spirit for living according to God's kingdom purposes.[442]

Importantly, according to this definition and the discussions surrounding it, the meeting with God is dialogical, beginning with the triune God's communication to worshipers through the liturgy in which they participate, and to which the worshipers respond. This idea was expressed in chapter three by Larson-Miller, Wainwright, and Cherry. It is this dialogical aspect that is essential to the concept of corporate worship as a transformational practice,

[442] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 303.

because it is God the Holy Spirit that communicates sanctifying grace to people. Understanding the means of grace found in corporate worship as practices which place people in "the path of the Spirit's wind," as written by Schmit, means that God is able to communicate with his people and transform them because of their involvement in worshiping and glorifying him.

Because of this dialogical aspect of transformational corporate worship, the inclusion of intentional, purposeful practices, especially those that are considered means of grace, as part of the liturgy is essential. While there are means of grace and spiritual disciplines that can be practiced by individuals, my project is focused on those means of grace that are typically experienced communally in a corporate worship service. Hancock's statement quoted in chapter three is appropriate here: "God forms us, individually and collectively, into a holy people through the communal life of the Body of Christ called church. At the center of this communal life is our worship. Worship is the action by which we are made into the Body of Christ."[443] The means of grace practiced in a communal setting are effective in part because of their communal nature, but also because of the varied ways in which they communicate to and through human beings. According to James K.A. Smith, the practices found in corporate worship are effective because they are not confined to cognitive ideas of theology and doctrine.[444] A comparison of Wesley's and Smith's perspectives on this idea will illustrate the importance of understanding the influence of the different aspects of the experience of communal worship.

8.3.1.1 Cognitive aspects of liturgy

Liturgical practices may not be confined to communicating only cognitive ideas of theology and doctrine, but they do influence those cognitive ideas for the people who participate in them. The idea of *lex credendi, lex vivendi* was discussed in chapter three. The claim that liturgical practices influence people's theological understanding is important, especially for evangelical churches which have no official liturgy. Cherry strongly recommends that liturgy be intentionally designed to communicate orthodox belief, saying, "Worship leaders must constantly critique worship in light of biblical, theological, historical, missiological, and pastoral considerations for faithfulness in our time."[445] Thus, she affirms that doctrine should

[443] Hancock, "Corporate Worship," 406.
[444] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 157.
[445] Cherry, *The Music Architect*, 241.

inform liturgy, understanding that the practices of corporate worship inform the beliefs of those who participate in it. In evangelical, "non-liturgical" churches, this responsibility falls on the shoulders of local pastors and worship leaders to oversee and critique what is being cognitively communicated in the practices of worship they employ. In addition, corporate worship practices effectively communicate theological understanding in non-cognitive ways that should be considered when planning worship services.

8.3.1.2 Non-cognitive aspects of liturgy

Smith uses the words "preconscious" and "nonconscious" to describe how humans make meaning of the world in ways that do not rely on traditionally cognitive types of knowing.[446] Although perhaps less nuanced, Wesley's ideas of the role of experience in the lives of Christians is comparable. The Prayer Book, for Wesley, provided official, written liturgy for public worship, representing the cognitive aspects of his theological program. However, Wesley also regarded experience, both his own and that of the people he led, as an important partner in his theological understanding. In his writings regarding public worship, he often referred to the Scriptural injunction to worship God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24).[447] When referencing this Scripture, however, he did not always explain exactly what he meant. In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, he says this: "God is Spirit…our worship should be suitable to his nature. We should worship him with the truly spiritual worship of faith, love, and holiness, animating all our tempers, thoughts, words, and actions."[448] This speaks not to the liturgy of public worship, but to the attitude and intention of the heart of the worshiper. He also referenced this passage in his sermon "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse IV." In this sermon, he says,

> …it is to worship him with our spirit; to worship him in that manner which none but spirits are capable of. …It is to love him, to delight in him, to desire him, with all our heart and mind and soul and strength; to imitate him we love by purifying ourselves, even as he is pure; and to obey him whom we love, and in whom we believe, both in thought and word and work.[449]

If the Wesleyan quadrilateral is used as the basis for Wesley's thought in this matter, Wesley's reliance on Scripture, tradition, and reason are firmly in the cognitive domain. The

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[446] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*.

[447] Wesley always used a lower-case "s" when referring to "spirit and truth" in this passage, indicating that he did not subscribe to the understanding of this particular instance of the word as referring to the Holy Spirit, but rather, to the spirit of the worshiper.

[448] Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*.

[449] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 203.

element of experience, however, encompasses everything else that might come to bear on a theological decision, including emotions, spiritual "senses," and, of course, what he called the "affections." These non-cognitive, or experiential ideas are clearly reflected in these explanations of what Wesley meant by "spirit" when he referred to John 4:23-24. "Spirit and truth" is also clearly reflected in Staples's idea of Wesley's balanced view of Word and Spirit discussed in chapter two.

Wesley's "Letter to a Friend" in 1757 illustrates in very practical language what he expected the worship of God in spirit and truth to look like. In this letter, he is defending the simplicity and sincerity of Methodist worship as compared to what he observed in many congregations of the Church of England in his time. In the first paragraph, he writes, "The persons who assemble there [in the Methodist church] are not a gay, giddy crowd, who come chiefly to see and be seen; nor a company of goodly, formal, outside Christians, whose religion lies in a dull round of duties; but a people most of whom do, and the rest earnestly seek to, worship God in spirit and in truth."[450] Again, in the concluding paragraph, he says the Methodist form of worship has many spiritual advantages. As a result, he asks, "What can be pleaded for them, if they do not worship God in spirit and in truth, with their lips while their hearts are far from Him—yea, if, having known Him, they do not daily grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ?"[451] Perhaps more telling, however, are some other phrases he uses within the letter that seem to reflect on the idea of "spirit and truth." The following excerpts from the second paragraph refer to the reading of prayers and the use of music found in Methodist worship as opposed to the Church of England.

> Nor are their solemn addresses to God interrupted by…the screaming of boys who bawl out what they neither feel nor understand. …When it is seasonable to sing praise to God, they do it with the spirit and with the understanding also…in psalms and hymns which are both sense and poetry…What they sing is therefore a proper continuation of the spiritual and reasonable service.[452]

The word pairs feel/understand, spirit/understanding, sense/poetry and spiritual/reasonable all seem to address Wesley's dual emphases of cognitive and experiential understanding. The "screaming of boys" refers to the boys' choir; later he refers to them as "wild, unawakened striplings." How can they lead a congregation in spiritual pursuits if they have no cognitive understanding of what they sing, or "feeling" engendered by an experience of spiritual

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[450] John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, 3 (London: The Epworth Press), 227.
[451] Ibid., 228.
[452] Ibid., 227–28.

awakening? Singing is to be done with the spirit (experiential) and understanding (cognitive). Proper psalms and hymns for the church should be both sense (cognitive) and poetry (experiential). Worship, for Wesley, is a "spiritual [experiential] and reasonable [cognitive] service" (cf. Rom 12:1).

A major part of the cognitive/experiential aspect of worship for Wesley is the use of music, specifically hymns, in the worship service. Again, in his view, hymns should contain theological truth as well as provide an opportunity for a spiritual experience. Hymn singing was a major component of the Methodist public worship. There were so many hymns used by the Methodists that there became a proliferation of hymn books. In Wesley's time, hymn books were purchased individually by the church members. Wesley recognized that "…the greater part of the people, being poor, are not able to purchase so many books."[453] Therefore, he collected 525 hymns[454] and published *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of The People Called Methodists.* In the preface to this collection, he referenced an earlier collection, which he said was too small. "It does not, it cannot in so narrow a compass, contain variety enough – not so much as we want, among whom singing makes so considerable a part of the public service." Not only does he claim that the collection covers "all the important truths of our holy religion…to illustrate them all and to prove them both by Scripture and reason," it is arranged according to the life experiences of "real Christians."[455] And, lest we assume that the hymns were merely intended to be pedagogical, he describes at length the poetic beauty of the hymns. Lastly, he says, "What is of infinitely more moment than the spirit of poetry is the spirit of piety. …It is in this view chiefly that I would recommend it to every truly pious reader: as a means of raising or quickening the spirit of devotion, of confirming his faith, of enlivening his hope, and of kindling or increasing his love to God and man."[456] Clearly, Wesley believed that singing hymns that expressed not only Scriptural truth, but the life experiences of Christians, and that provided non-cognitive ways of participating, was an important practice of corporate worship that could teach theology as well as offer spiritual experience in non-cognitive ways. Wesley insisted that the Spirit of God would speak to people through various means, both cognitive and non-cognitive. With that perspective of the

[453] John Wesley, Franz Hildebrandt, and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, *The Works of John Wesley: A Collection of Hymns for the Use of The People Called Methodists*, 7 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 73.
[454] This book contained only the texts of the hymns; it did not include the music.
[455] Hildebrandt, *The Works of John Wesley*, 74.
[456] Wesley, Hildebrandt, and Beckerlegge, *The Works of John Wesley*, 75.

unity of Word and Spirit, as seen in Staples, I will turn my attention to more current voices who explore various modes of non-cognitive experience found in corporate worship.

Smith, in his book *Imagining the Kingdom*, explores the idea that the content of transformational worship involves much more than the words and ideas that are explicitly expressed in the liturgies found in churches. Based on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu, Smith builds a complex argument for preconscious or nonconscious knowing or "know-how," learned by habituation, as a basis for transformational worship. In addition, Smith brings in the ideas of Mark Johnson in relation to metaphor, poetry, and aesthetics as integral to transformational worship practices. Smith says, "Because our words mean more than their propositional content—and because worship is intended not only to inform the intellect but also to recruit the imagination—we will want to be attentive to the poetic and metaphorical power of words to evoke the world to come."[457] Here Smith focuses less on the words and ideas explicitly expressed in worship than on what is experienced below the surface that changes how worshipers perceive and respond to God and to the world. He asserts that "historic Christian worship and ancient spiritual disciplines carry the Story that seeps into our social imaginary," and that this is accomplished through liturgical practices that are aesthetic and rich in the use of story and metaphor.[458] Smith invites those who plan worship services to consider how human beings are influenced in ways that reach deeper than the cognitive level of words and ideas that may express proper theological formulations, but do not speak to the imagination.

Smith's discussion of the ways in which worship can be transformational is related to the Wesleyan idea of training the affections, in that he asserts that repetition is key. Smith says, "It is in their repetition that the story begins to sink into our imagination, thus sanctifying our perception and engendering action toward the kingdom."[459] Repetition of words, heard, spoken, or sung, along with actions and other "noncognitive" elements are intrinsic to liturgies that enable the practice of corporate worship. When speaking of liturgy, there is an expectation that the practices found in it will be in some way repeated from week to week as a community worships together. This was Wesley's expectation, as he instructed his

[457] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 175.
[458] Ibid., 174.
[459] Ibid., 185.

followers to faithfully attend public worship services in order to practice the means of grace found in the liturgy.

For Wesley, Christian formation that leads to sanctification comes largely through the repeated practices of the church in worship. Clapper also says, "One of the implications of this Wesleyan vision of what is essential to Christianity is that Christianity is first and last a form of life, not merely a form of thought. …Worship not only reflects a form of life, worship itself can be seen as a form of life."[460] In this light, Wesley's vision becomes even more encompassing of the whole of human life. Smith refers to the "things we love" as those things that operate below the surface and drive our actions, and that the things we love are "acquired products of formation."[461] He also talks about a person's "background" as "the buildup of habits and inclinations that dispose me to regularly construe my world in certain ways. And…Christian worship is, in some sense, construal training: it is a divine encounter that should, over time, effect 'background' transformation by reshaping my horizons of constitution."[462] These statements point to similar ideas offered by Clapper regarding the affections as discussed in chapter two. Developing the affections on a level that changes the heart as well as the mind requires repetition. When corporate worship is presented as a practice that includes many of the means of grace, it is with the understanding that 1) it will be practiced regularly, and 2) it will include intentional elements, both cognitive and noncognitive, that provide avenues for God's grace to effect transformation.

Larson-Miller also emphasizes that repetition over a lifetime is an essential part of the transformational power of corporate worship. She says,

> Our liturgical celebrations, transformative here and now and over the long pilgrimage of life…change us and the world, they confirm transformation, they are the means of sanctifying grace. …By our participation in these realities, we worship the living God in whose image we are made, into whose likeness we grow, and in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).[463]

The act of participating in the means of grace, in this case, through the liturgy, puts people in a position to receive the grace of God that leads to transformation. Inherent in this statement

[460] Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church*, 103.
[461] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 32.
[462] Ibid., 51.
[463] Larson-Miller, "Sanctification and Worship," 180–81.

is the fact that the liturgy in which worshipers repeatedly participate is multi-dimensional, that it communicates to humans on more than just a cognitive level.

The Christian narrative that is the basis of liturgy, is, of course, communicated through words, as well as through embodied practices. According to Smith, however, even language-based communication is not merely cognitive. He says,

> Liturgies are formative because they are both kinaesthetic and poetic, both embodied and storied. Liturgies are covert incubators of the imagination because they play the strings of our aesthetic hearts. Liturgies traffic in the dynamics of metaphor and narrative and drama as performed pictures of the good life, staged performances of some vision of the kingdom that capture our imagination and thus orient our love and longing.[464]

Worship that has the potential to transform participants, then, must be made up of liturgies that intentionally employ bodily action, stories, poetry, and aesthetic considerations in addition to cognitive aspects. Smith's proposal is that a focus on the cognitive aspects of the Christian faith alone is not adequate for transformation of the heart. Wesley's focus on worshiping God in spirit and truth indicates that he would agree. Wesley's emphasis on the use of music as a method of theological teaching, as well as his insistence on regular participation in the communal means of grace, would fit within Smith's vision. There is no doubt that Wesley placed a high value on logic and reason, but that does not negate the fact that he believed in spiritual experience and transformation that are not obtainable by logic alone. Cognitive assent to propositions was not enough. The experience that Wesley looked for was something that, as Smith says, "transforms our imagination and hence sanctifies our perception."[465] In Wesleyan language, it is something that trains our affections to love the things that God loves. The means of grace, as a channel for the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of believers, is key in Wesley's vision, and can be seen as a concept related to Smith's "liturgical anthropology" and essential to a practice of transformational worship.

Practices that constitute the means of grace are present in all worship services to some extent. However, none of my participants were aware of a connection between their regular attendance at worship services and their transformational experiences. The means of grace

[464] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 137.
[465] Ibid., 175.

are not missing, but they are not purposefully conceived in a way that they are recognized as beneficial to the spiritual transformation of the church and the individuals who are a part of it.

8.4 Conclusion

The Wesleyan Church of North America has, over time, lost some of the distinctives of its original Wesleyan theology. Two related results of neglecting these ideas are that there is disillusionment regarding the possibility of significant spiritual transformation, and there is a lack of understanding of the possibilities inherent in corporate worship for spiritual growth and transformation. Because corporate worship and sanctification have not been connected in a meaningful way, and the rigid presentation of the "shorter way" of sanctification is no longer predominant, the pathway to meaningful spiritual growth and transformation is unclear. My participants' stories reveal a lack of purposeful practices that communicate a Wesleyan understanding of either sanctification or the means of grace.

There are two primary areas which require attention in order to revitalize the optimistic theology of entire sanctification as envisioned by John Wesley. The first idea is the possibility of real change, of being filled with the love of God and neighbor in a profound way through spiritual growth *and/or* through an identifiable crisis experience. While correcting the problems of the past, it is important to not abandon this doctrine of entire sanctification, because it offers hope to people who are discouraged and frustrated about their inability to live up to how they believe they should live as a Christian. Drury says, "Many, or maybe even most believers" struggle over time with "bringing our thoughts, values, attitudes, habits and activities into conformity with Christ."[466] The possibility of this type of spiritual transformation is good news that should be revived in the practice of The Wesleyan Church, while not limiting the ways in which people are expected to experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The second area that requires attention is the understanding of corporate worship as a venue for transformational growth. The inclusion of the means of grace in purposeful ways in the liturgy of the local church is vital for corporate worship to be an effective and consistent locus for spiritual growth and transformation. The intentional inclusion of acts of worship that involve cognitive as well as non-cognitive engagement is an essential part of

[466] Keith W. Drury, *Holiness for Ordinary People*, 25th ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2009), 18.

allowing the means of grace to become "worship in spirit and truth" for those who practice them.

In the next chapter I will offer practical suggestions addressing these issues. In my opinion, these are issues that, if corrected, will result in an increased awareness of the connection between corporate worship and transformation, and also greater effectiveness of The Wesleyan Church in fulfilling their vision of "transforming lives, churches and communities through the hope and holiness of Jesus Christ."[467]

[467] https://www.wesleyan.org/

9 Practical Recommendations

This chapter will focus on practical outcomes of my research related to the previous chapter's normative reflections and my participants' experiences. I will recommend practices and/or corrections to practices of The Wesleyan Church based on the research I have presented in this thesis. Osmer calls this the "pragmatic task of practical theological interpretation: the task of forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable."[468] These "strategies of action" will be based on the conclusions found in chapter eight, encompassing recommendations for pastoral leadership in The Wesleyan Church. The recommendations focus on communication of Wesleyan doctrine and specific worship practices that exemplify the means of grace. I will discuss the purpose and meaning of time-tested practices as well as the idea of creating new practices. Although I am focusing my recommendations on The Wesleyan Church, they are appropriate for any church that identifies the need to provide purposeful practices of corporate worship that are conducive to the spiritual transformation of regular participants.

9.1 Christian practice and theological reflection

The practices of the church and its theology are connected. Ideally, a church's espoused theology should reflect its normative and formal theology (see the discussion of Helen Cameron *et al*'s "four voices of theology" in the introduction), and the espoused theology should be evidenced by its practices. Miroslav Volf says there is "an intimate link between beliefs and practices. …Shaping practices—shaping a way of life—is internal to the very nature of these [Christian] beliefs."[469] The relationship between a church's theology and its practices was discussed in the introduction in relation to the word *praxis.* Practices become *praxis* when they embody and communicate their *telos*, or ultimate purpose and meaning. When church members are engaged in *praxis,* God communicates through the practices to the participants, and, as well, the participants both seek God and respond to him through their practices.

Volf adds to the discussion of how theology is tied to practices, explaining how Christian practices express God's purpose for creating humans, which he says is "to image God and

[468] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 175–76.

[469] Miroslav Volf, "Theology for a Way of Life," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, 10th ed., ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2013), 251–52.

live in communion with God." He calls this the "as-so" structure that applies "to the relation between who God is and who human beings are and therefore how they ought to behave ('As God, so we')."[470] The result of seeing Christian practices in this way, according to Volf, is that our beliefs commit us to acting accordingly. As an example, he remarks, "Rightly to espouse the belief that God is 'the God of peace' (Romans 15:33), for instance, is, among other things, to commit oneself to the pursuit of peace."[471] This "as-so" structure can also be applied to the Wesleyan belief in the ability of a human being to live a holy life through the sanctifying grace of God given by the Holy Spirit. As God is holy, so are we called to be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). If this theological stance, espoused by The Wesleyan Church, is believed by its members, that belief should be expressed in the practices in which individuals participate, including those practices found within corporate worship and, ultimately, in the ways in which those individuals engage with the world around them.

The practices that make up corporate worship represent the lived experiences of real people. Reflecting on the relationship between theology and practices is not merely a mental exercise, but helps in the process of making practices more meaningful for the participants. The purpose of reflecting theologically on practices of the church is, as Kathryn Tanner asserts, "to meet pressing practical needs." She elaborates on this idea, writing,

> It [theological reflection] figures importantly in Christian life not just because Christian beliefs are an essential ingredient of activities with a meaning for their participants, theology in that case hold[ing] out the option of giving a reflective depth and breadth to one's understanding of what one does. More than this, I suggest, theological deliberation is a critical tool to meet problems that Christian practices, being what they are, inevitably generate.[472]

My purpose in offering theological reflection on the practices of The Wesleyan Church regarding corporate worship is to highlight the need for the practices of the church to express relevant meaning to those who participate in them. Additionally, I want to address the problems identified in this thesis that have been generated by the historical practices of The Wesleyan Church, and how those problems have resulted in either skewed practices or a lack of purposeful practices in the contemporary church, which in turn have resulted in disillusionment with or lack of understanding of the doctrines of the church. Theological

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[470] Ibid., 252.
[471] Ibid., 253.
[472] Kathryn Tanner, "Theological Reflectin and Christian Practices," in Volf and Bass, *Practicing Theology*, 228.

reflection is critical in order to understand not only why we do what we do, but also to discover some "strategies of action," as Osmer says, to correct the areas in which the practices of The Wesleyan Church do not correlate with its expressed beliefs.

The idea of correcting skewed or missing practices in The Wesleyan Church is not to reinstate without reflection the practices that were used by John Wesley over 200 years ago. By investigating the practices he used and the theology that informed them, however, it is possible to make recommendations that speak to the experiences of Wesleyans today. Tanner says this requires "effort-filled deliberative processes [to determine] what Christianity stands for in our own lives for our own time and circumstance."[473] It is not a matter of simply recommending that today's church should follow Wesley's practices, however "correct" they may be judged to be, or how effective they were in his culture and time. However, by consulting the work of scholars such as Knight, Westerfield Tucker, and John Wesley himself regarding the means of grace and their place in the practices of corporate worship in chapter three, I have laid the theological foundation for my recommendations. How have these practices been deemed relevant in the past, and how are they relevant today? Tanner continues, "Theological reflection deepens engagement in Christian practices—for example, by developing the religious values and ideas that inform them and uncovering the awareness of spiritual realities that participation in them conveys."[474] Understanding the spiritual realities of Christian practices is essential. At the same time, although the practices in use today, whether traditional or new, may, in fact, be good and meaningful in some way to the participants, it is not enough to engage in spiritual practices without understanding why we do them or their spiritual purpose. Lack of understanding may lead to unintended negative consequences.

The rest of this chapter will offer reflections on the current teaching and practices of The Wesleyan Church in relation to its distinctively optimistic theology of sanctification, the means of grace in corporate worship, and the experiences of my participants and the reports of others on these subjects. If a historical doctrine is deemed to be valuable for today's church, it must be *perceived* to be valuable and attainable in the lives of real people. The recommendations to follow are intended for that end.

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[473] Ibid., 233.
[474] Ibid., 234.

9.2 The optimistic theology of sanctification

As outlined in the previous chapter, there is a reported lack of congruence in The Wesleyan Church between the official doctrine of the denomination regarding entire sanctification and the operative theology expressed in the local church. Due to my limited sample size, this claim cannot be verified by this study for the entire denomination. The problem was identified by Drury, Maddox, and others in relation to representative churches in the holiness movement. Diane LeClerc reports similar findings in discussions with her students at a Nazarene university. She explains, "The pendulum seems to have swung from legalism to pessimism about victory over sin. Many of my students believe that sin is inevitable, pervasive, and enduring in a Christian's life. Sadly, they seem to be unaware of a different way to live."[475] This pessimistic view is incongruous with Wesley's optimistic theology. LeClerc, in the introduction to her book, makes this statement, quoting Wesley: "Wesley believed 'that the Christian life did not have to remain a life of continual struggle' against the power of sin. For him, to deny this type of victorious transformation was 'to deny the sufficiency of God's empowering grace—to make the power of sin greater than the power of grace,' which was unthinkable for Wesley."[476] The pessimistic view regarding victory over sin that LeClerc saw in her students should not be the norm in Wesleyan-holiness churches. My small sample of Wesleyans were all people who had experienced some degree of transformation, so they evidently believe that transformation is possible. However, three of my participants did not understand or had not heard of the doctrine of sanctification. Monica, a pastor's daughter, said, "Can you use it [the word "sanctification"] in a sentence for me?" On the other hand, eight of the eleven people interviewed were familiar with it and testified to at least being "on the journey" towards it. Everyone in this group saw it as a process, and not a "one and done." Some of the comments were: Frieda - "It's a constant moving towards him. Deeper and deeper and deeper and following after him." Jenny - "It's a daily giving of yourself to God, daily, moment by moment, hour by hour, minute by minute." Anna - "When we are sanctified, we give him everything. When we are saved, I don't necessarily think that we have turned over our whole life. I believe it is a process we have to go through. It's kind of like growing up." Ian -"It's a purification process." For these people, the doctrine was seen as positive and attainable *over time*. George, one of the younger participants, felt that the

[475] Diane Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2010), 17.
[476] Ibid., 107.

word “sanctification” is “a nice, old-fashioned church word for saying live a holy life. And a holy life would be a life filled with the Holy Spirit.” For all of these people, sanctification is a commitment to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit daily, being willing to make the changes necessary to become more like Christ. These comments indicate that the doctrine of entire sanctification is not completely lost in The Wesleyan Church, but it also is not always clearly understood, and the word may even be unfamiliar to some or hold negative connotations to others. Those who felt they had experienced sanctification, however they defined it, saw it as a positive experience. As an example, Betty expressed feelings of freedom, joy, and peace as a result of her experience. Anna reported positive changes in her relationship with her husband. The possibility of experiencing what Wesley called “perfect love” for God and neighbor, evidenced by a closer, more fulfilling relationship with God, a positive change in one’s attitudes and resulting behaviors, freedom from the tyranny of personal sin, and the ultimate impact on society effected by people who have experienced these changes are reasons for revitalizing this doctrine in The Wesleyan Church.

If, as George said, “sanctification” is an old-fashioned word, there are two possibilities to make the doctrine understandable for today’s church. The first is to use the word, but carefully teach what it means and its benefits to the church members in language that makes sense to them and that speaks to their experience. The other is to use different terminology, such as “spiritual transformation.” However, the term “spiritual transformation” is more general, and does not describe in particular what is meant by the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification. To ensure that the official doctrine of the church is understood by its members, this central tenet of Wesleyan theology ought to be clearly communicated as the optimistic doctrine promoted by Wesley for the good of the church and the good of the world.

Related to promoting the doctrine of sanctification, I recommend promoting Wesley’s understanding of the means of grace. In chapter two I discussed how the adoption of the “shorter way” theology resulted in both pessimism regarding the possibility of sanctification as well as the abandonment of the means of grace as a pathway towards it. Although the means of grace are present in various forms in Wesleyan church worship services, they are not generally understood or presented as such in the experience of my participants. From their descriptions of their local church worship services, the means of grace are not part of the discourse in their churches. Most of my interviewees did not perceive a connection between

what they experienced in corporate worship services and their experience of sanctification, and none of them spontaneously used the words “means of grace.”

We can infer from the apparent lack of understanding of both the doctrine of sanctification and the means of grace by my participants that there is a lack of education regarding these subjects in the churches attended by these people. Correction can be made by teaching these subjects in a way that presents sanctification as desirable and attainable through regular practice of the means of grace in faith, as Wesley recommended. Communication of these central Wesleyan ideas is the responsibility of pastors and other teachers in the church. Teaching can be accomplished by cognitive means, such as preaching, or by the careful use of words and ideas found in the liturgy of the worship service, as well as by the noncognitive aspects of corporate worship practices, as discussed in the previous chapter. Teaching is not always accomplished with words, but also by practice and repetition. These practices are potentially loci for the influence and action of the Holy Spirit in the lives of participants, providing possibilities for sanctifying experiences.

9.3 Purposeful Practices

Spiritual transformation that results in people as individuals and corporately as the church who are more like Christ and reflect God’s love for the world is the goal of the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification, however that doctrine may be communicated. A properly balanced doctrine of entire sanctification requires a purposeful practice of the means of grace. Among the practices included in the means of grace are those which are typically part of the liturgy of corporate worship, making corporate worship an important avenue for the Holy Spirit to prepare a person for the transformational event known as entire sanctification. To act as effective means of grace in a way that encourages a balanced relationship with God, the practices included in corporate worship in The Wesleyan Church should be theologically informed and intentionally designed to communicate both the presence and the identity of God, as presented by Knight in chapter two:

> Wesley approached the issue of presence and identity through his understanding of the means of grace. The presence of God can only be perceived by faith, and faith is both received and maintained in a community whose participants were *[sic]* encouraged and enabled to see themselves and the world before God. The identity of God can only be known by faith through participation in those means of grace which convey identity, such as scripture and the eucharist. In the

> process Wesley offers fresh insight into the mutual interrelatedness of the presence and identity of God.[477]

The revelatory nature of these practices is not as neatly categorized as Knight implies here. Knight makes clear later that these two emphases are mutually interdependent, and that the categories he suggests are not exclusive.[478] His argument, however, uses these general categories of presence and identity to suggest that all of the means are important, and if either emphasis is "impoverished," it "diminishes the relationship with God."[479] Worship should be made up of purposeful practices that communicate a cognitive understanding of who God is as revealed in Scripture and the ancient traditions of the church, as well as an experiential understanding of who God is as the One who desires a relationship with people. The problem remains, however, that the current normative theology of The Wesleyan Church as found in the *Discipline* does not specifically promote practicing the means of grace in ways that purposefully address these ideas. As a denomination that professes to follow Wesley's teachings, this is a glaring omission.

The following are specific means of grace recommended by Wesley that are normally, but not exclusively, practiced in the course of corporate worship. These are included in the list of "instituted" means noted in chapters two and three, and they were also discussed in chapter seven as they were found in my participants' stories. Each practice will be described here in more detail, specifically for its place in corporate worship. As noted by Westerfield Tucker, "The means are 'instituted' because Christ, as demonstrated in Scripture, ordained them to be used, and the church from the early period onward had practiced them."[480] The instituted means of grace typically included in a corporate worship service include prayer, Scripture, The Lord's Supper, and Christian conference.[481] I will also include music, as well as the possibility of other means of grace not found in Wesley's lists. Recommendations for theological and practical reflection on these practices follows.

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[477] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 12–13.

[478] Ibid., 13.

[479] Ibid.

[480] Westerfield Tucker, "Wesley's Emphases on Worship and the Means of Grace," 228–29.

[481] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 5. Fasting is also included in the instituted means of grace, but I have not included it here because it is not typically practiced during the course of a corporate worship service in The Wesleyan Church.

9.3.1 Prayer

A discussion of the means of grace as found in corporate worship practices appropriately begins with the subject of prayer as a central practice of the church. John Wesley said in a letter that prayer is "the grand means of drawing near to God."[482] To draw near to God and to be changed by that nearness is the purpose of the means of grace, and the most direct way of drawing near to God is through the practice of prayer. Saliers says that prayer is "ongoing communion with God," and that "authentic *prayer* [as opposed to *prayers*, which may be voiced or heard without authentic engagement] is wholehearted attentiveness or attunement to God in and through the utterances."[483] When the church prays, they are given the *privilege* of communicating with Almighty God, which should not be taken lightly. Root says, "It is sometimes practice itself that opens up the possibility for such experience of God, for example, prayer."[484] These authors are pointing to the unique place of prayer in the life of the church, both collectively and individually. Ideas such as "drawing near," "ongoing communion," "attentiveness or attunement," and "experience of God" indicate how central the role of prayer is to the Christian life, and to the possibility of spiritual transformation. Wesley listed prayer first when listing "the chief" of the means of grace, which included prayer, Scripture, and the Lord's Supper.[485] Constance Cherry calls prayer "the heart of worship."[486] Her view of corporate worship and prayer begins with the idea, as discussed in chapter three, that corporate worship is dialogical, that is, it constitutes a time of revelation and response between God and God's people. Drawing from that idea then, in a general sense, the whole service of worship can be seen *as* prayer if prayer is also conceived of as a two-way conversation with God. Cherry asserts,

> Prayer *in* worship is good; worship *as* prayer is better yet. Christian worship must be fundamentally viewed as consisting of all the worship acts that, when gathered up, constitute one comprehensive prayer for the world, for Christ's church, and for ourselves as citizens of the kingdom of God. Essentially, "public prayer" refers to the total worship experience, from its beginning to its end."[487]

This general view of corporate worship *as* prayer is a good foundation for understanding worship as a conversation between God and the people of God. However, the particular

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[482] John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, 4 (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 90.
[483] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 87; emphasis in original.
[484] Root, "Evangelical Practical Theology," 93.
[485] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 160.
[486] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 142; emphasis in original.
[487] Ibid., 144.

practices incorporating various types of prayer bring focus to that understanding, providing times for specific, intentional acts of corporately speaking to God verbally.

Some authors, however, have noted a decline in the time allotted for the intentional practices of prayer in contemporary churches. Cherry, moving on to the importance of specific practices of prayer *in* worship, found this to be the case.

> In many churches today, praying in worship is in decline. In some churches it has all but disappeared. Unfortunately, this is more likely to be true for services in the contemporary style, which tend to be devoted almost entirely to an extended time of singing followed by a lengthy time of preaching or teaching. As the minutes given to singing and preaching swell (in any style), other features are squeezed out, most notably prayer and Scripture readings.[488]

I have personally observed this basic pattern of music and preaching in many churches. There is usually a pastoral prayer after the time of singing, and perhaps a short closing prayer. Gribben says that "Modern Protestanism" was influenced by revivalistic ideals. The pattern of the revival services was "liturgical and doctrinal minimalism," in order to appeal to people from any background.[489] This meant that formal liturgy from established churches was not used, which meant that some things were left out. This pattern has become the norm for many evangelical churches.

Kenneth Ulmer, a pastor in a non-denominational evangelical church agrees with this assessment from his experience. Writing about promoting transformational worship in his own church in *Worship That Changes Lives*, says "Prayer is the area most neglected, minimized, deemphasized, and *especially*, least practiced."[490] This realization of the lack of prayer in his church's worship services prompted him to do a study on corporate prayer in the Bible. He points to the practices of the New Testament church as a model of the meaningful practice of prayer for the church. He says, "Corporate prayer was a prominent part of their agenda. …If you follow the life of believers in the first church, you discover that prayer was not their last resort but their first response. The church was a church under persecution. …through it all they remained a church of prayer."[491] Although Ulmer is not a Wesleyan, his reminder of the foundational practices of corporate prayer found in the New Testament

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[488] Ibid.

[489] Robert W. Gribben, "Wesleyan Worship and the Means of Grace," *Journal of Wesleyan Thought* 1, no. 1 (2018): 9–10, https://static1.squarespace.com.

[490] Kenneth C. Ulmer, "Transformational Worship in the Life of a Church," in Abernethy, *Worship that Changes Lives*, 194.

[491] Ibid.

church is an appropriate beginning to this section, which will focus on the importance of intentional times of prayer as a prominent part of corporate worship.

With that foundation understood, I will begin with the experience of my participants, then continue to the specific types of prayer listed by John Wesley when he spoke of public prayer. This list is not exhaustive; there are other types of prayer that could be included, but for the sake of brevity, I have confined my comments to Wesley's list.

In my interviews, three people mentioned prayer as an aspect of the worship services they attend that they especially appreciated, or that could have contributed to their transformational experiences. Two of these people, Monica and Kari, specifically mentioned times when the congregation prayed for each other as especially meaningful and helpful for them spiritually. Kari described the experience this way:

> One of the best times is when we have prayer time, when he [the pastor] prays and invites people to come to the altar if they want to. …if I didn't have anything in particular that I was real concerned about that I need, I would just go and just praise him, or if there's somebody else at the altar, then I would go and lay hands on them and pray for them. These are some of the best and the closest times where you join together with other people; where you carry their burdens and bring them before the Lord.

Kari's story indicates that this type of prayer time is initiated by the pastor, at which time people are invited to come to the altar at the front of the sanctuary to pray. This usually includes kneeling at the altar when people are capable of that. This type of congregational prayer is not unusual in Wesleyan churches. The second person, Monica, also finds the times of prayer that actively involve the congregation praying for each other to be meaningful. She said, "We believe in the power of prayer and praying for each other. So sometimes there's community prayer and involvement like that, like anointings." At one point in her story, she recalled how she was the recipient of this type of community prayer and felt it resulted in physical healing for her. These experiences strengthened her faith and were part of her story of transformation in that she recognized a need to return and commit to her church. Anna was the third person who talked about congregational prayer. Her story was of an extended time when the local church prayed for "revival." In this case, they were praying for the salvation of people in their community. During that time, several people who were loosely associated with the church made decisions to follow Christ. She felt the concentrated time of corporate prayer prompted this result, and increased her faith.

Overall, there were very few mentions of corporate prayer in the interviews. More of the participants talked about their own habits of personal prayer, which, of course, is also a means of grace, but not part of this project. When I asked the participants to describe the worship services at their churches, the three people quoted above were the only ones who even mentioned prayer as a practice in the worship services in their church. This does not mean that prayer was not included in the worship services attended by the other participants. It does suggest that whatever times of prayer were included in those services did not stand out as especially important or meaningful to them. This indicates that more attention needs to be given to specific times of public prayer as one of the means of grace present in corporate worship. I will turn now to examining John Wesley's ideas of what public prayer as an instituted means of grace should include. Wesley noted "the four grand parts of public prayer," including "deprecation, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving,"[492] which were included in the regular liturgy of the Church of England. Thus, in Wesley's view, inclusion of these four types of prayer were essential to a complete practice of prayer in corporate worship.

Deprecation

In Wesley's time and in this context, "deprecation," according to Robert Gribben, meant "self-examination and confession."[493] Gribben also says that Wesley, in other places, referred to this type of prayer simply as "confession."[494] Wesley expected Methodists to practice this form of prayer individually on a daily basis, but also included it in the types of prayer he considered essential for public prayer in corporate worship.[495]

As noted previously, The Wesleyan Church does not have prescribed or recommended liturgy for corporate worship, except for specific rites, including the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism. Thus, unlike Wesley's experience using the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* for both public and private prayer, The Wesleyan Church offers little guidance for specific types of prayer. In the *Discipline* of The Wesleyan Church there are two examples of prayers of self-examination and confession in the rite for the Lord's Supper as it is presented to be used as an entire service. There is also a shorter form of the rite that does not include these prayers.

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[492] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 94.
[493] Gribben, "Wesleyan Worship and the Means of Grace," 5.
[494] Ibid.
[495] For reference, some biblical passages that instruct believers to confess their sins can be found in James 5:16, 1 John 1, and Psalm 32:5.

In the longer rite, the first instance occurs at the end of the "Call to Worship" section, where the minister is instructed to say,

> This service is therefore a time of special sacredness and we can only be properly prepared by giving our hearts and minds to reverent worship, and by being freed of all things contrary to the divine nature and purpose. Therefore let us bow in a period of silent prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and to bring us into conformity with the holiness of the God we serve.[496]

This is obviously intended to be a time of individual silent prayer of self-examination. The second prayer comes after the sermon. The instructions are: "Then the minister shall pray an extemporaneous prayer or use the following." Thus, the prayer of confession that follows is not required. If the celebrant chooses to use the written prayer, it is as follows:

> Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all persons, we acknowledge that in Your sight all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. Outside of Christ we are sinners, and it is only through His atonement that we are forgiven and cleansed. Whatever there is of purity and virtue in our hearts or in our lives is the product of Your grace. We come today to remember once again how Christ obtained our salvation. And as we do, we ask that the Holy Spirit shall search our hearts. If we have committed any act which is displeasing to You, or neglected any duty which would have honored You, reveal it and forgive, we pray. Or if there is any tendency to disobedience, to the love of the world, or to the exaltation of self, reveal it and purge it from our hearts, we pray. You have told us that if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. Our hope, our trust, our righteousness are in Him alone. Have mercy upon us for His sake, and grant that we may serve and please You in newness of life and purity of heart, world without end, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.[497]

These prayers, although included in the *Discipline* for a specific purpose, can be used as examples to inspire prayers of self-examination and confession for regular use in corporate worship services. Other examples of this type of prayer can be found in Scripture. Psalm 51 and Daniel 9:4-17 are examples of prayers of confession recorded in the Bible. While Psalm 51 is written as a personal confession, the ideas in it can be applied to a corporate prayer. These passages, as well as prayers found in the liturgies of more formal churches that reflect the practices of centuries of tradition, are good resources for pastors and congregational leaders to use either verbatim, or as examples to formulate their own prayers of self-examination and confession for use in their churches. Cherry offers further guidance for this

[496] Editing Committee, *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2022*, 279–80.
[497] Ibid., 280–81.

type of prayer. She says, "Confession comprises three movements: 1) a scriptural invitation to confess sin, 2) the confession, and 3) the assurance of pardon."[498] The assurance of pardon, she says, is necessary, because "confession without assurance is incomplete. We do not want to end with confession and merely hope for the best. Rather, we end with our acceptance of forgiveness and the promise of grace." She recommends using a scriptural passage as the best source for assurance.[499] These three aspects of the prayer of confession can be seen in the prayers quoted from the *Discipline*.

Petition and Intercession

Although Wesley listed these two words separately in the "four grand parts of public prayer," he does not explain them here or in other places. This list comes from his argument for Methodist meetings not superseding the place of the Church of England. His reason is recorded in the minutes of the Methodist Societies conference:

> But some may say, 'Our own service is public worship.' Yes, *in a sense*—but not such as supersedes the Church Service…If it were designed to be instead of Church Service, it would be essentially defective. For it seldom has the four grand parts of public prayer: deprecation, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving.[500]

Steve Johnson posits that the "four grand parts" were taken by Wesley from a devotional guide, "The Whole Duty of Man," that was included in his *A Christian Library*. In this anonymously-written guide, the author presents five parts of public prayer—the same as Wesley's list, with the addition of confession as a separate type.[501] Johnson continues by explaining that Wesley's rationale for representing these types of prayer as essential to a complete church service is that they are all included in the liturgy of the Church of England. Any omission would make it "defective."[502] My reason for not giving these two types of prayer separate sections here is that Wesley apparently did not differentiate between them in his writing. Cherry states that "Technically speaking, intercessions are understood to be requests made to God concerning the needs of others and the world; petitions are requests

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[498] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 161.

[499] Ibid.

[500] Henry D. Rack, ed., *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference*, The Bicentennial edition of the works of John Wesley 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 326.; emphasis in original.

[501] Steve Johnson, "John Wesley's Liturgical Theology: His Sources, Unique Contributions and Synthetic Practices" (Doctor of Philosophy, Nazarene Theological College, 2016), 70–71, accessed August 11, 2023, https://pure.manchester.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/54581738/FULL_TEXT.PDF.

[502] Ibid., 71.

made for oneself. Both are included in the prayer of intercession."[503] An overview of Wesley's sermons reveals that when he used the word "intercession" or "intercede" in his sermons, he was always referring to the intercession of Christ for humanity, quoting passages from Scripture such as Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25.[504]

An example of how Wesley used the term "petition" can be seen in his discourse on The Lord's Prayer in his sermon "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount." Wesley organizes the prayer into three parts: the preface, the petitions, and the doxology. The petitions begin with "Hallowed by thy name" and continue through "deliver us from evil." He never uses the word "intercession," although the "petitions" in this prayer include prayers for the world (Thy kingdom come on earth…) as well as for ourselves (Give us this day our daily bread). Cherry includes both terms in what she calls "the central prayer of corporate worship,"[505] the prayer of intercession, which, she says, is "comprehensive enough to gather up the concerns of the community and the world and present them to God."[506] While making a sharp technical distinction between the two words may not be necessary, it is important to recognize and include both types of requests—those for members of the congregation and those for the world.

As discussed in chapter three, corporate worship expresses the participation of the church in the high priestly office of Christ. This participation is nowhere seen as clearly as in the church's prayers of intercession. Torrance says, "He [Christ] calls us that we might be identified with him by the Spirit, not only in his communion with the Father, but also in his great priestly work and ministry of intercession, that our prayers on earth might be the echo of his prayers in heaven."[507] The church has a calling to participate fully in intercessory prayer, not only for ourselves, but for the world that Christ loves. Greggs says, "This active participation of the believer within the mediation and intercession of Christ in prayer is an expression of the perfect and complete priesthood of Christ in which the community of the church corporately participates by the Spirit."[508] Greggs emphasizes that the corporate participation of the church in prayer is the expression of the church's "*corporate* nature of

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[503] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 158. (note 51).

[504] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 132, 281 The one exception was in "A Call to Backsliders" when he used an illustration of intercession on behalf of a criminal in a legal case.

[505] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 158.

[506] Ibid. (note 50).

[507] Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace*, 14.

[508] Greggs, *Dogmatic Ecclesiology*, 278.

priesthood for the church in Christ," where, he says, "In its intercessions *the church* takes the priestly form of Christ, in whom it participates and in which the individual subsists: the whole body is conformed into the likeness of Him who is its head: ...Intercession in its priestly form is corporate before it is individual."[509] This emphasis on the corporate nature of intercessory prayer is an important consideration for the American evangelical church, where there is a tendency to minimize the corporateness of the church and maximize individual autonomy. Cherry agrees that "Prayer in worship…is not primarily a matter of numerous individuals voicing their own prayers to God at the same time (many people offering many prayers); rather, it is the unified community offering one prayer to God (many people offering one prayer)."[510] When 1Peter says that "you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood" (1 Pet 2:9), it is not referring to individuals, but to the church as a whole. The church, as the Body of Christ, acts as Christ on earth, offering intercession for the world. This "corporateness" of public prayers of intercession and petition is what differentiates this particular means of grace from the individual prayers that Wesley recommended as daily practice. When individual worshipers engage with the prayers of the church, the very corporateness of the practice is significant.

Closely connected to petition and intercession is the prayer of lament. Wesley did not specifically include lament in his categories of prayer, nor did he speak about it as a type of prayer, despite the presence of many examples of lament in scripture, particularly in the psalms. Walter Brueggeman, in *The Message of the Psalms,* calls the psalms of lament "songs of disorientation," saying, "Here I group together all the psalms that reflect (from one side or the other) the awareness that things between Yahweh and Israel are messed up."[511] This idea that things are "messed up" brings the psalmists of the past and the church of today to voice their laments to God who is the one who can make things right. Cherry says, "Lament is a prayer form rooted in the Scriptures that is underused in worship today; but if we rejoice with those who rejoice, we must also weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15)."[512] Petitions and intercessions by the church for our own pain as well as the pain of the world

[509] Ibid., 281–82; emphasis in original.
[510] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 147.
[511] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, Augsburg Old Testament studies (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), 58.
[512] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 149.

around us presuppose that those pains are allowed and even encouraged to be voiced in the community of believers, as is evidenced by the inclusion of laments in Scripture.

Although Wesley did not speak of lament as a category of prayer, he did speak of some aspects of lament in his sermons, usually using the term "mourning." He mourned what he considered to be the sinful state of his own culture. In the sermon, "Awake, Thou That Sleepest," he said,

> How does our own land mourn…under the overflowings of ungodliness! What villainies of every kind are committed day by day; yea, too often with impunity by those who sin with a high hand, and glory in their shame! Who can reckon up the oaths, curses, profaneness, blasphemies; the lying, slandering, evil speaking; the sabbath-breaking, gluttony, drunkenness, revenge; the whoredoms, adulteries, and various uncleanness; the frauds, injustice, oppression, extortion, which overspread our land as a flood?[513]

This awareness of the chaos and disorder of his nation, described by Wesley as ungodliness, is, for Wesley, a subject of intercessory prayer for those hearing his sermon and for the world. He says, "O God, 'in the midst of wrath remember mercy!' Be glorified in our reformation, not in our destruction. Let us 'hear the rod, and him that appointed it.' Now that 'thy judgments are abroad in the earth,' let 'the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.'"[514] For Wesley, his prayer is not only for those suffering injustice, but for the reformation and salvation of those who cause injustice. In a related vein, but with a slightly different emphasis, Brueggeman refers to the "reality of chaos, disorder, and disorientation" evident in the language of the Psalms, pointing to the brokenness of the world, citing "the hurt and terror in others" as the subject of lament.[515] While Wesley focuses on sin in this quote, he understands that the consequences of sin result in the type of distress and brokenness referred to by Brueggeman. These difficult subjects of prayer should not be avoided by the Church. One way of looking at laments is as a prayer describing to God how we feel about whatever is causing distress and asking for his intervention. It is a burden as well as an honor for the church to participate in the priesthood of Christ in this way. When we recognize that all is not right with the world, and people are being harmed by the

[513] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 93.
[514] Ibid., 94.
[515] Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Eugene OR: Cascade, 2007), 9.

"wrongness" of the things that are happening, that pain should rightly be brought to God in honest prayer both for ourselves and for the world.

Prayers of petition and intercession, including prayers of lament that speak honestly about pain, are central to corporate worship. When the local church prays *together* for their own concerns, for the church worldwide, and for the world outside of the fellowship of the church, they are participating in the priestly office of Christ through the Holy Spirit, while, in the process, opening themselves to the transforming grace of God. These prayers are not the only types of prayer that should be offered during a corporate worship service, but they are, as Cherry says, "central."

Thanksgiving

The final type of prayer listed by Wesley is thanksgiving. The fact that he mentions it as one of the four types of prayer indicates that he expected it to be more than simply an opening or closing sentence or two included in the pastoral prayer. It could be that he was thinking of the "Great Thanksgiving" series of prayers surrounding the Eucharist in the liturgy of the Church of England, which would have been included in the worship service every week. Since his recommendation of these four "grand parts" of prayer are linked to his understanding that they are integral to the liturgy of the Church of England, this is a possibility, but not expressly stated. Looking again at the communion ritual included in the *Discipline* of The Wesleyan Church, there is a truncated version of the Great Thanksgiving included in the longer rite. It reads,

> Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who in mercy gave Your only Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption: accept our praise, we beseech You. We thank You for Your love, for the gift of Your Son, for the sacrifice He made in our behalf, for the forgiveness of our sins and the cleansing of our hearts, for the present witness of Your Holy Spirit to our hearts that we are Your children. Grant that, as we receive this bread and wine, in memory of Christ's death and suffering, in communion with You and with Your children, we may be made partakers of His body and blood; who, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, …and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you: do this in memory of me." In the same way, after supper He took the cup, …and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is

> poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins; do this, whenever you drink it, in memory of me." Amen.[516]

This prayer includes, in brief form, all the elements of the Great Thanksgiving except the congregational response in the middle, such as the "Sanctus," thereby reducing the congregation's opportunities to participate in the prayer. Furthermore, The Lord's Supper is not required to be celebrated every Sunday in The Wesleyan Church, so this one "required" prayer of thanksgiving may or may not be present in the service. Since the church has no prescribed liturgy for corporate worship that would regularly include prayers of thanksgiving, following are biblical reminders of the normativity of this type of prayer in the church.

Pheme Perkins traces the history and theological bases of Christian worship found in the New Testament, saying that "the building blocks of Christian worship are all mentioned in Paul's letters."[517] In her discussion of these "building blocks," Perkins points out that prayers of thanksgiving are a theme throughout the Pauline epistles. In her assessment of Paul's instructions, she says,

> Whether they are gathered as a community to worship God or praying individually, joy and thanksgiving should be the melody for Christian prayer. Believers celebrate the goodness of God's saving presence. Perhaps that rejoicing does not seem remarkable, but every letter adopts this approach in a context of suffering that could have destroyed the fledgling churches.[518]

Paul's admonition to "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances" in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 is a prime example of this observation. Beyond the specific times of prayer in the church, Paul taught that thanksgiving should permeate not only the prayers, but the entire fabric of the church, as can be seen in Colossians 3:16-17. "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." The idea that thanksgiving should permeate the worship of the church is echoed by Brueggeman, even in the face of times requiring lament.

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[516] Editing Committee, *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2022*, 281–82.

[517] Pheme Perkins, "New Testament and Worship," in *Theological Foundations of Worship: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical Perspectives*, ed. Khalia J. Williams and Mark A. Lamport, *Worship Foundations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 26.

[518] Ibid., 29.

Brueggeman describes how the psalms offer authentic praise to God in all of life's circumstances. He says, "The collection of the Psalter is not for those whose life is one of uninterrupted continuity and equilibrium."[519] However, the general pattern of the psalms of lament is that they move from the complaint or plea for God's help to praise. One of the factors in the praise element of these psalms is the "assurance of being heard," either with the idea that being heard is enough, or that "if Yahweh has heard, he will act."[520] Finally, the psalm ends with "doxology and praise. The God who has been accused is now acknowledged as generous and faithful and saving."[521] Brueggeman submits that it is the honest speech to God that builds up the relationship between God and his people to "new possibilities of faithfulness."[522] There are, of course, psalms of thanksgiving and praise that celebrate who God is and what he has done, which are appropriate to use as examples of prayers of thanksgiving in the church. However, the corporate practice of thanksgiving and praise "in all circumstances," in the midst of expressing our pain and the suffering of the world to God in honest speech, is a purposeful practice that brings new depth to the relationship between the church and the God they worship.

Prayer is the first of Wesley's "chief" means of grace. It is a central practice of corporate worship, providing avenues of drawing near to God. While the entire service can be seen broadly as an expression of prayer by its dialogical aspect, the four specific types of prayer recommended by Wesley—deprecation, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving—are specific practices of prayer that not only involve the individual, but the corporate body. Prayers of deprecation allow worshipers to look at themselves as individuals and as the church in light of God's holiness. Prayers of petition and intercession provide opportunities to bring concerns of individuals and the local congregation to God, as well as to act as a royal priesthood on behalf of others, representing them to God in prayer. Finally, prayers of thanksgiving "declare the praises of him who called you [the church] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9). As noted previously, prayer as an element of corporate worship was rarely mentioned by the participants in this study. It is an area that requires critical attention by those who plan worship services. The intentional provision of opportunities for

[519] Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms*, 14.
[520] Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 56.
[521] Ibid.
[522] Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms*, 14.

worshipers to meaningfully engage in corporate prayer as a specific practice within the larger concept of corporate worship *as* prayer is crucial to the spiritual well-being of the church.

9.3.2 Scripture

Scripture, as the second of Wesley's "chief" means of grace, is presented here as a subject of congregational practice and participation, although it is also a means of grace recommended for private practice. Wesley specifically mentions in his sermon "The Witness of the Spirit," "reading, hearing, and meditating thereon." While hearing is the most obvious corporate practice, the other two are also possible. This means of grace is the part of the corporate worship service *as* prayer in which God speaks to the congregation. Unfortunately, in my participants' stories, no one mentioned Scripture being read in their churches. This does not necessarily mean that Scripture is never read aloud in their services, but when asked to describe the worship services in their churches, none of the participants included hearing Scripture being read in their descriptions. This is quite different from what is known about the ancient practices of the early church.

A central practice of the New Testament church was to read Scripture aloud during services. Beginning with the meetings of the new group of believers in the second chapter of Acts, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." If Peter's sermon in the same chapter can be used as an example, the apostles' teaching would have included much from what we know as the Old Testament. Mark Quanstrom, in *The Pastor as Theological Steward,* says, "In the beginning, they read aloud the only Scriptures they had at the time, the Septuagint…Then, as Paul and other apostles began writing letters to individual churches, they, too, were read aloud when Christians gathered and then copied and circulated among other churches."[523] Reading Scripture aloud during corporate worship has been practiced from the beginning of the Christian church. Since most people would not have had access to either the Jewish scriptures or the apostles' letters, corporate worship was the only time they would be able to hear it.

Centuries later, Wesley still expected Scripture to be read aloud in church, and considered it to be a means of grace. As discussed previously, Wesley placed a great deal of importance on the normativity of Scripture in his theology. At the same time, he placed a great deal of

[523] Mark R. Quanstrom, "Steward of Worship," in *The Pastor as Theological Steward*, 1st ed., ed. Al Truesdale (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2022), 81.

importance on spiritual experience to assist in interpreting Scripture appropriately. Wesley believed that God uses Scripture to communicate with people through the Holy Spirit. Outler presents Wesley's teaching that "the Spirit's testimony is conveyed conjointly, through Scripture by divine illumination and also by the Spirit's gracious sanctifying presence."[524] The Spirit's testimony, both by illumination and presence, is the purpose of the means of grace. According to Staples, the "inner witness of the Spirit" in Wesley's theology referred not only to the assurance of salvation, but to his hermeneutic of understanding Scripture. It is the Holy Spirit who witnesses to the truth of the Word.[525] It is because of this that reading and hearing Scripture is an important means of grace. To read or hear Scripture on a regular basis in the context of corporate worship is one way for God to speak to the community with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Leroy and Summers, though their book focuses on individual practices, explain why the corporate practice of hearing Scripture is also important: "Just as this sacred story has the power to shape the individual into the likeness of Christ, it also calls out a collective people, unleashing them in the world with the humble love and holy passion of God."[526] The church is called to be holy as a community. The church *together* is the Body of Christ, called to be transformed for the sake of the world.

To add more Scripture reading is an investment of the time allotted for the worship service in the local church. In my experience, often the only Scripture read in the worship service is the passage being used for the sermon. As mentioned by Cherry in the section on prayer, the reading of Scripture can get "pushed out" by other elements of the worship service.[527] If the pastor or worship planner wants to increase the likelihood of worshipers being transformed, prioritizing this central means of grace is worth allowing some time for it. Recognizing that North American churchgoers may not be comfortable with hearing long passages read aloud, more creative ways of including Scripture in the service are possible. Some examples are dramatic readings or enactments, videos, Scripture songs, and readings brought by well-rehearsed children. An intentional practice of reading Scripture in corporate worship which allows the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Word to the hearts and minds of the worshipers will strengthen the transformational possibilities of corporate worship.

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[524] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 393.
[525] Staples, "John Wesley's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," 96–97.
[526] LeRoy and Summers, *Awakening Grace*, 31.
[527] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 144.

The Sermon

The sermon falls under the category of Scripture being "expounded." The *Cambridge English Dictionary* defines "expound" as "to give a detailed explanation of something" (https//dictionary.cambridge.org, 11/23). Wesley included Scripture being expounded in the list of the means of grace for use in the Methodist societies.[528] Hearing Scripture as it is written, without commentary, has its own value. Hearing an educated explanation of Scripture in a sermon is also helpful. Four of my participants mentioned that hearing the sermons in their worship services was important to them. These were Evan, Ian, Donald, and Anna. Evan and Ian both said they looked forward to them. Donald said his pastor's sermons "reached him." Anna thought the sermons in her church were likely one of the elements of the worship services that influenced her prior to her transformational experience.

If the sermon is to be considered a means of grace in the category of Scripture, it should certainly be based on Scripture. Scott Daniels declares,

> Whatever else Christian ministers are, they are first and foremost women and men called to know, experience, proclaim, and embody the knowledge, hope, and possibilities of the gospel. …Those commissioned and ordained to be guardians of the gospel must know the story well. This entails deep devotion to and study of the primary source of this story, the Christian Scriptures. To know and love the story well is to understand and be able to rightly articulate how this story is woven through the various forms of literature that make up the Bible. Stewards of the gospel are stewards of the Scriptures.[529]

The purpose of the sermon, in the context of the means of grace, is to "expound" or explain Scripture to the congregation. However, to be effective, the explanation of Scripture must be applicable to the hearers. Daniel continues, "Being stewards of the gospel implies not only knowing and understanding what has happened but also being formed by the prophetic imagination that makes the gospel good news in the present."[530] The sermon, in The Wesleyan Church, as in many evangelical churches, is the central element of the worship service, and often, the longest portion. It is an opportunity for worshipers to participate in the means of grace if it is rightly used to expound the Scripture so they can hear from God in a way that speaks to their experiences of life.

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[528] Thompson, "The Practical Theology of the General Rules," 9.

[529] T. S. Daniels, "Steward of the Gospel of God," in *Essential Church: A Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, ed. Diane Leclerc and Mark A. Maddix (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 2015), 25.

[530] Ibid., 25–26.

Both the reading of Scripture and the expounding of it in sermons are examples of the dialogical aspect of the worship service. These are opportunities for God to speak "out loud," in a sense, to the gathered community. In much of the worship service, worshipers are primarily speaking to God. Through the Scripture and sermon, the community is given the opportunity to hear from God in an extended form. This is, as Wesley indicated, a "chief" means of grace in the life of the church.

9.3.3 The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper, although listed by Wesley among the other means of grace, bears more weight, as it is also considered a sacrament. In The Wesleyan Church, the *Discipline* requires that it be practiced at least quarterly, and recommends at least monthly.[531] Its description is one of the few places in the *Discipline* that mentions the means of grace, saying,

> We believe that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death and of our hope in His victorious return, as well as a sign of the love that Christians have for each other. To such as receive it humbly, with a proper spirit and by faith, the Lord's Supper is made a means through which God communicates grace to the heart.[532]

In spite of this position of the church, none of my participants mentioned the Lord's Supper as a meaningful part of their experience of corporate worship, which, as with some of the means previously mentioned, does not mean it is not practiced in their churches. I only asked them to "describe the worship service in your church." Since the Lord's Supper is not generally practiced every week in The Wesleyan Church, it may not have come to mind when they thought about their typical experience of worship. It does seem, however, that someone would have mentioned it if they felt it was a highlight for them.

In relation to the Lord's Supper as a means of grace, Staples suggests that Wesleyan-Holiness churches have not traditionally connected the Lord's Supper to a call for holiness. "For them," he says, "the very normality, regularity, and the ritualistic nature of the sacrament militates against such an understanding."[533] The reason for the disconnect between this central sacrament and holiness, he argues, is again due to the emphasis on revivalistic preaching of entire sanctification, as discussed in chapter two. He continues,

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[531] Editing Committee, *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2022*, 278.
[532] Ibid., 23.
[533] Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1991), 204.

> The preaching such persons have heard on sanctification, often in a revivalist atmosphere, has tended to emphasize it only as an instantaneous crisis experience, with an invitation for the listeners to seek entire sanctification then and there. This invitation has usually taken the form of an evangelistic altar call, which may be emotion-packed, rather than an invitation to the Lord's Supper, which is usually perceived as a more staid and formal occasion. It is easy to see how those whose concepts both of sanctification and of Eucharist are thus formed could easily miss the connection between Eucharist and sanctification.[534]

Wherever this is the case, in spite of the normative belief of The Wesleyan Church that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace, in practice it is not always offered as such to worshipers. This is another example of a lack of theological reflection and communication regarding the spiritual benefit of this sacrament. Again, following the influence of revivalism, sacramental practices were reduced to a minimum in evangelical churches. Officially, The Wesleyan Church teaches that it is a sacrament and a means of grace, but it is only required to be offered every three months. Wesley teaches, in his sermon "The Duty of Constant Communion," "The grace of God given herein confirms to us the pardon of our sins by enabling us to leave them. As our bodies are strengthened by bread and wine, so are our souls by these tokens of the body and blood of Christ."[535] In this sermon, Wesley says that it is "the duty of every Christian to receive the Lord's Supper as often as he can." It is a duty, first, because it is "a plain command of Christ."[536] The second reason is because the benefits of doing so are so great. He says, "This is the food of our souls: this gives strength to perform our duty, and leads us on to perfection."[537] Wesley's view of the Lord's Supper indicated here is that he values it as an act of obedience, but to balance that, there is great reward for our own spiritual well-being and growth. He pleads with his readers, "Let everyone therefore who has either any desire to please God, or any love of his own soul, obey God and consult the good of his own soul by communicating every time he can."[538] Wesley considered the Lord's Supper an indispensable practice for experiencing the grace of God that leads to holiness.

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[534] Ibid.
[535] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 502–3.
[536] Ibid., 502.
[537] Ibid.
[538] Ibid., 503.

Staples follows Wesley's idea, calling the Lord's Supper the "Sacrament of Sanctification."[539] He sees it as a continuous participation in sanctifying experiences that result in spiritual transformation. He explains,

> The Eucharist may be understood as that means of grace, instituted by Jesus Christ, to which we are invited for repentance, for self-examination, for renewal, for spiritual sustenance, for thanksgiving, for fellowship, for anticipation of the heavenly kingdom, and for celebration in our pilgrimage toward perfection in the image of Christ. All these are involved in our sanctification, and all these are benefits available to us at the Lord's table.[540]

Staples's claim that this single practice encompasses so much is bold. But of all the particular practices of corporate worship, this is the only one in which all these areas of meaning are included. These benefits of the Lord's Supper identified by Staples point to this sacrament having the potential to be a powerful means of grace in the lives of participants. It is no wonder that Wesley recommended participation in it as often as possible. Communication of its various properties can be accomplished by the manner in which it introduced and served, the words, prayers and songs surrounding it and during it, and even the demeanor of the officiant. Will it be focused on remembrance, thanksgiving, or fellowship? Will the congregation spend more time in personal contemplation, or in sharing together? What will be communicated to the congregation about this sacrament as a means of grace? While all of these varied emphases are intrinsic to the sacrament, one or more may be highlighted to communicate various aspects of it.

As with the other practices of corporate worship, the Lord's Supper is dialogical, and can be conceived of as a form of prayer. Knight describes the Wesleys' understanding of the presence of Christ in the bread and wine "in terms of an interaction between the Spirit and the communicants."[541] As an interaction, it involves both parties. Cherry remarks, "Regardless of the theological position a given community holds in regard to the Table, it is still understood to be part of a conversation with God in a most relational sense."[542] Practicing the Lord's Supper in the context of the community of faith is a way for the body of Christ to interact with God by the invitation of Christ to come to his table, where we can express our love and gratitude and receive grace from the Holy Spirit. This "chief" means of grace should be given

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[539] Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace*, 202.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Knight, *Anticipating Heaven Below*, 124.
[542] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 104.

a place of honor in the worship of the church, presented to participants as a valuable practice for their spiritual benefit.

9.3.4 Christian Conference

In Wesley's lists of the means of grace, "Christian conference," like prayer and Scripture, can be practiced on an individual basis outside of the context of a corporate worship service. Knight says that Christian conference "includes both the fellowship of believers and rightly ordered conversations which minister grace to hearers."[543] All of my participants talked about the importance to them of Christian community in the church. Seven of them specifically felt that participation with the community of believers was influential in their transformational experience. Ideas about what influenced them included "God's people meeting in God's place worshiping God in unity," participation in a discussion group during a corporate worship service, communal prayers during the worship service, a sense of belonging, sharing experiences with other believers, and the encouragement of Christian friends to attend worship services. The impact of the fellowship of believers was particular to each individual, but it is significant that these participants felt that its importance was related to their spiritual transformation and to times of corporate worship.

In his sermon "On Zeal," Wesley said, "That his [God's] followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one—the church, dispersed all over the earth; a little emblem of which, of the church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation."[544] According to Wesley, God never intended for his people to experience spiritual transformation on their own. In a letter, Wesley addressed this idea:

> One admirable help toward conquering all is, for believers to keep close together; to walk hand in hand, and provoke one another to love and to good works. And one means of retaining the pure love of God is, the exhorting others to press earnestly after it. When you meet on a Sunday morning, I doubt not but this will be the chief matter both of your prayers and conversation. You may then expect to be more and more abundantly endued with power from on high; witnessing that He is faithful and just both to forgive us our sins, and also to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.[545]

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[543] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 5.
[544] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 468–69.
[545] Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 52.

Meeting together and interacting with one another is essential for spiritual growth and transformation. Wesley included "Christian conference" as a means of grace because he saw its benefit in the lives of his followers. Dean Blevins says, "For Wesley, Christian community provided the context and the means for spiritual formation through an accountable discipleship anchored in shared story, shared practices, and relational bonds."[546] For Christian community to become a means of grace, it must involve more than a group of individuals who happen to come to the same place for worship. Peter Marty, in his chapter, "Shaping Communities," says,

> It isn't the sudden muttering of religious phrases or the enduring of particular rituals that creates life-giving worship. Rather, it is well-conceived praise that mediates the gospel and redeems people over long stretches of time—redeeming them, among other things, from the mistakes of individualistic spirituality. …Worshiping together, they grow in their attentiveness to the source, shape, and purpose of the abundant life that is theirs.[547]

These comments indicate that the corporateness of the worship service is an essential factor in the pursuit of spiritual transformation, not only for individuals, but for the transformation of the church. It is possible to experience Christian conference as individuals, but for the purpose of this study, I will focus on strategies to encourage Christian conference as it relates to the corporate worship service.

Blevins suggests that at the heart of the idea of Christian conference as a means of grace is worship. He says, "A Wesleyan approach to congregational life begins first with worship as the central practice of formation. …This corporate practice…deeply penetrates the identity of persons who participate in the narrative and practices that constitute worship."[548] While personal, active participation by the worshipers is their own choice, worship planners and leaders can design and lead services that invite the congregation to participate more fully. Cherry calls this type of leader a "hospitable worship leader."[549] She says,

> Corporate worship is not a self-guided tour, where we enter when we want and do as we wish until we leave. Corporate worship involves doing things together as we carry on the corporate conversation with God. A guide (the worship

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[546] Dean G. Blevins, "The Church as Formational Fellowship," in Leclerc and Maddix, *Essential Church*, 138.

[547] Peter W. Marty, "Shaping Communities: Pastoral Leadership and Congregational Formation," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig R. Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2008).

[548] Blevins, "The Church as Formational Fellowship," 143–44.

[549] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 290.

> leader) functions much as a host would at a dinner party. …Just as in a social event, it takes intentionality and skill to engage all the worshipers in such a way as to include them in the conversation with God from beginning to end. Participation is the key.[550]

Passivity in corporate worship, according to Cherry, is a common problem, which she says is influenced by the "broadcast era" of the 20th century. It can be found in churches with a "concert style" worship band performance as well as more traditional churches with choirs and soloists "performing" for the congregation if those services do not also include opportunities for participation of the whole church.[551] These realities result in the concern that attending worship services on a regular basis does not necessarily mean the attendees are personally engaged in meaningful worship practices in a way that is transformational to the person or to the gathered community who is meeting together. To correct this problem, it is incumbent upon pastors and worship planners to intentionally design worship services that invite attenders to become participants.

The purpose of the practices of corporate worship is to provide an avenue for God, through the Holy Spirit, to communicate with the church, and for the church to be able to express itself in response to God. This avenue is only possible if the church's traditions and practices are felt to be relevant to worshipers. Bennet *et al*. say that we "inhabit" our traditions.

> Practice, then, is the "Alpha and Omega" of theological discourse. Theological traditions (codified practices of believing and behaving) have a guiding and formative role, but their function is to facilitate practical following of the way. This requires a degree of both performance and improvisation. Thus we participate in and inhabit traditions—a matter of embodied "dwelling" rather than cognitively "believing".[552]

The people who are invited to participate with the gathered body of Christ in worship are dependent on the leadership of the church to offer practices which effectively "embody" the theological ideas that may or may not be voiced. The content as well as the presentation of that content are both important, as the language and actions that are repeated become the traditions that are inhabited. Additionally, practices repeated in the context of community, as noted by Mann in chapter six, are especially effective in encouraging belief. Participation in practices goes beyond passive watching and hearing. Church leaders have a responsibility to

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[550] Ibid., 292.
[551] Ibid., 291–93.
[552] Bennett et al., *Invitation to Research in Practical Theology*, 66.

provide meaningful, purposeful, theologically sound, relevant practices in their corporate worship services that encourage participation.

Christian conference, in the context of corporate worship, includes everything from simply gathering together for the purpose of worshiping God to participation in specific practices of worship. Wesley recommended several means of grace that are included in corporate worship as practices, but he also recognized that the very act of joining together to participate in those means of grace is an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to impart grace to God's people.

9.3.5 Music

Music, although not included in the "official" lists of means of grace, can certainly be counted as a "prudential" means, which Thompson describes as "those that are discovered to be means of grace through Christian prudence, or the wisdom gained by an engaged participation in the life of discipleship. …moreover, the prudential means of grace tend to be context-related responses to commands that *are* explicitly Scriptural."[553] The Scriptural mandate to sing in worship of God, found in both Old and New Testaments gives added strength to the argument that music can be counted as a means of grace (cf. Ps. 96, Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16).

Not only can music be counted as a prudential means of grace, it encompasses the instituted means of prayer, Scripture, and Christian conference due to the content of the songs that can be sung and the act of communal participation that is involved in the practice. As for music being represented in The Wesleyan Church, the practice of singing in corporate worship is well-represented historically and in the contemporary church. The only caution for pastors and worship planners is to carefully choose the music that will be used in the church and to enable congregational participation.

Cherry says, "The songs we sing testify to what we believe as Christians; they assert the doctrines of orthodox Christian belief and practice. Songs proclaim what we believe objectively, and, in their singing, we come to own that belief. Singing the faith helps to make it our faith."[554] The leaders who choose the music are putting words into the mouths of the worshipers—words that those worshipers will come to believe. Rattenbury writes that "The Methodist hymns were from the first treated by him [John Wesley] as doctrinal documents.

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[553] Thompson, "The Practical Theology of the General Rules," 16–17.
[554] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 174.

Not only in his prefaces to hymn-books, but in his treatises and sermons, he refers to them as authoritative expressions of Methodist theology."[555] It is not necessary to use only traditionally Wesleyan hymns; all types of music are acceptable if they are carefully evaluated for their theological content and "fit" or suitability for the local congregation. Cherry's book, *The Music Architect*, is a guide for what she calls a "pastoral musician." Referring to her previous book, *The Worship Architect*, she offers a definition of this term:

> A pastoral musician is a spiritual leader with developed skill and God-given responsibility for selecting, employing, and/or leading music in worship in ways that serve the actions of the liturgy, engage worshipers as full participants, and reflect upon biblical, theological, and contextual implications, all for the ultimate purpose of glorifying God.[556]

The book offers guidance for developing this kind of musical leadership in the church, covering many aspects of leading this crucial part of the corporate worship service. One of these aspects that she considers essential is that the leadership of the church should critique music before using it. She offers three rationales, related to how the music functions in the worship service, that provide a sound basis for this type of judgment. They are:

> 1) We will sing this song because it helps to tell the story of God. …Does this song contribute in an obvious way to what God has done, is doing, and will do from creation to re-creation?
>
> 2) We will sing this song because it helps worshipers to fully participate in the God-given ways called for in Scripture. …Does this song enable worshipers to be full participants in the action of the liturgy?
>
> 3) We will sing this song because it responsibly represents our Christian faith tradition. …Does this song contribute to our understanding of the Christian faith?[557]

These recommendations are general enough to include all varieties of music. Some other, more particular recommendations for choosing music are found in *The Worship Architect.* Some of these recommendations, under the headings "Theological Strength, Lyrical Strength, and Musical Strength," are summarized here. First, songs should present fully developed theological ideas, biblical accuracy, and an understanding of the Triune God in their use of names and titles for God. Second, the lyrics should be well-constructed, logical, and clearly

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[555] J. E. Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: The Epworth Press, 1941), 62.

[556] Cherry, *The Music Architect*, 3.

[557] Ibid., 102.

understandable to the congregation, even when poetic language or imagery is used. Furthermore, to encourage participation and ease of singing, the lyrics and the music should be well-matched. Music should be well-constructed, and the melody should be memorable, interesting, and accessible to the average singer.[558] A final point of evaluation is that of cultural context. Cherry says, "Every church has its own dynamics that have shaped it as a community."[559] Different congregations relate to different types of music. For the sake of providing purposeful, meaningful practices of worship in which the whole community can participate, the culture, experiences, ages, and abilities of the entire congregation need to be considered.

Eight of my research participants spoke of how music in corporate worship was especially meaningful and helpful for them spiritually. The comments of two people express how this particular means of grace encompasses both of Knight's emphases, the presence of God and the identity of God.

Frieda told of two specific times in her life when she experienced the emotionally healing presence of God through the music of worship.

> …it was just like a balm for my soul. And there would be no reason for it, but I would just sit there and weep before the Lord. …it was a sweet, sweet time that the Lord just gave peace and joy through going and worshiping him. It wasn't through the Bible reading or message or anything like that. It was literally through the time of worship [music] and just worshipping the Lord.
>
> It was hurting a whole lot…It was through the balm of worship that came every week that was healing. And I could cry and raise my hands and say, life is not always good, but my God is *always* good. He is always good and worthy to be praised. And it was through the worship and the songs that we sang that brought healing.

George learned about God through the lyrics of the music he sang. For him, the words of the songs were important.

> So Christian worship-type music has always been around me…for me, sometimes the best sermon I identified with during the weeks was lyrics in songs, and even more so than a sermon in the church on a Sunday. …a lot of times, you know, the speaking was always good, but I always resonated more with the music.

[558] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 205–7.
[559] Ibid., 208.

Music in worship can be an expression of three of the other means of grace: prayer, Scripture, and Christian conference. Depending on the lyrics, songs may be prayers to God or expressions of Scripture or scriptural themes. When music is sung together, it "breaks down individualism and builds up a sense of togetherness," and it is "a way of expressing the corporate nature of the body of Christ."[560] Because of its function in the worship service as a means of grace, music in the church should be planned carefully. Any consideration that falls short of understanding the importance of what is being offered to the congregation for their spiritual formation and transformation indicates a weakness in theological and practical reflection on this worship practice.

9.3.6 Other means of grace

I have limited this discussion until now to Wesley's list of instituted means of grace that are typically found in a corporate worship service, with the addition of music, for the reasons listed. However, these practices are not the only ones that can be called means of grace. "Prudential means of grace" are context-oriented. While Wesley listed some prudential means, they were particular to his time and place, and to the context of the Methodist societies. Knight says they have an "open-ended character," and that, for Wesley, "the fact that such practices are discovered to be means of grace through practical experience makes them no less true means of grace."[561] Embracing Wesley's idea of "discovering" means of grace through practical experience is an invitation to the church to be creative in finding those things that speak to people in various ways. Practices that, as Crutcher says, "contribute to creating the space for encounter"[562] may or may not be found in the traditions of a local congregation. But, finding those practices that are particular to that congregation's "personality" and experience is a purposeful way to include means of grace that, as Root says, "draw the human agent into divine action."[563] In the means of grace, God acts, and humans respond. The divine action is not initiated by the human, but the participation in the practice is the human's activity signifying their desire to place themselves in "the path of the Holy Spirit's wind."[564] Mann advises, "In regard to the question of appropriate means of grace, then, we should take a very pragmatic approach. Any activity, device, or method that enhances our receptivity and responsiveness to the gracious call of God can be a vital means

[560] Cherry, *The Music Architect*, 174.
[561] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 16–17.
[562] Crutcher, *The Crucible of Life*, 179.
[563] Root, *Christopraxis*, 70.
[564] Schmit, "Worship as a Locus for Transformation," 37.

of grace in our pursuit of and growth in holiness."[565] Reflection and creativity are called for in recognizing the practices that have the potential to act as means of grace in a congregation's life.

I have previously discussed Knight's caution to keep a balance of means of grace that communicate both the identity of God as well as the presence of God in order to avoid having an overly intellectual or overly emotional relationship with God.[566] Knight, then, focuses on the importance of *what* the various means communicate about God to the people who practice them. Mann, on the other hand, focuses on the importance of *how* the means communicate to the people who practice them. Mann says, "The chief problem arises when we rely on means that appeal only to one aspect of who we are. We are complex, multidimensional beings, and the best that we can do for ourselves is to participate in various means of allowing God's grace to empower us for receptivity and responsiveness to God's call to holiness."[567] Both of these views express valid concerns. For pastors and other leaders, then, an examination of the particular practices of the local church is needed to reveal the effectiveness of current practices as means of grace. Do they focus on the identity of God (divine attributes, names, character, history of actions in Scripture, etc.) or on the presence of God (more experiential, possibly emotional, relational)? Is there a balance between these two? How do the practices communicate to people in the congregation? Are there practices that are purposefully provided to communicate to people of all ages, with various backgrounds, personalities, educational levels, and disabilities? Do the practices of the church offer multiple ways of encountering God besides passively listening? Do people report experiencing the movement of God during such practices of the church? These are evaluative questions that can assist in planning effective, purposeful practices that act as prudential means of grace.

9.4 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on reflecting theologically and practically on the practices of The Wesleyan Church and how those practices do or do not display the espoused and formal theology of the church, followed by recommendations for churches regarding those practices. The experiences related by my participants reveal evidence that the practices of corporate worship in The Wesleyan Church fall short of communicating its professed theology. Based

[565] Mann, *Perfecting Grace*, 170.
[566] Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*, 13.
[567] Mann, *Perfecting Grace*, 171.

on my analysis, communication of two basic tenets of Wesley's theology is lacking. First is the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification. Second is Wesley's confidence in the practice of the means of grace to achieve it. The practices that were examined were Wesley's "chief means of grace," consisting of prayer, Scripture, and the Lord's Supper, as well as music and the possibility of other prudential means. These were considered in the context of corporate worship to discover how they may be more effectively practiced in ways that communicate grace to the participants.

I noted one idea regarding the worship service that could be seen in all the means of grace of which the service is comprised. This idea is that the entire service can generally be conceived of as prayer. This view is based on the concept of both prayer and corporate worship as dialogical, meaning that in the practices of prayer and corporate worship, God and humans are coming together and engaging in relationship, each having opportunities for speaking and listening. The different means of grace included in the corporate worship service are then subsets of that overarching idea of communication between God and his people. The general idea of corporate worship constituting a time of prayer does not negate the necessity to include various types of prayer as intentional practices in a worship service. Wesley felt that four types of prayer—deprecation, intercession, petition, and thanksgiving—were essential elements of a complete worship service, based on the pattern of the Church of England's liturgy. These types were investigated for their particular emphases and purposes. Since The Wesleyan Church does not have a prescribed liturgy, these particular types of prayer may or may not be included in the worship services of local churches. My participants' stories did not reflect a robust, meaningful practice of multiple types of prayer in their churches.

From continued analysis of my participants' stories, the other means of grace typically found in corporate worship services, namely Scripture and the Lord's Supper, are similarly deficient in the amount of purposeful attention given to them as corporate practices relevant to sanctification. Public reading of Scripture and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper were not mentioned by my participants at all. Hearing the Scripture expounded in sermons was noted to be important to several people, and is a major part of corporate worship services in The Wesleyan Church. I have no data to determine how well the sermons heard by my participants fulfill their purpose of expounding Scripture.

Finally, music and other practices not specifically listed by Wesley were discussed as prudential means of grace. Prudential means can consist of practices particular to the context

of the participants. They are evaluated by what and how they communicate to people, and how well they fulfill the purpose of the means of grace, that is, to provide a place for people to receive and respond to the working of the Holy Spirit.

Wesley believed wholeheartedly in the possibility of spiritual transformation, or sanctification, both of the church and the individuals who make up the church. His optimism about that possibility rests on the grace of God, who gives generously to those who seek it. In Wesley's theology, grace is a gift, as are the means to encounter that grace. Purposeful, meaningful practices are necessary for the operant theology of The Wesleyan Church to correspond more closely to its espoused and formal theology. These practices, carefully considered to speak to today's church will offer the possibility for worshipers to regularly find themselves in a place which opens them to the action of the Holy Spirit to impart God's grace that will transform them into "a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." (Ephesians 5:27)

10 Tying it all together

This thesis has been a discovery and analysis of practices found in The Wesleyan Church of North America today in relation to traditional Wesleyan theology regarding sanctification and corporate worship. Two ideas formed the basis for my investigation: 1) A basic tenet of Wesleyan theology is the possibility of the Holy Spirit enacting transformation in a person to the extent that they experience and display the love of God and neighbor above all else, and 2) The practices typically included in corporate worship which are considered means of grace should provide a path towards receiving transforming or sanctifying grace from the Holy Spirit. The resulting investigation through literature and interviews was designed to answer the research question: "If the content of the liturgy by which people worship week by week is claimed to be a means of grace, and therefore part of the key to the spiritual transformation of believers, can that theoretical connection be identified in the lived experience of Wesleyans today?" The stories of eleven Wesleyans were gathered and analyzed to determine how their lived experience in relation to the claims found in the literature review answered that question. The result was a tapestry woven from the threads collected in all of the various investigations, providing an enlightening picture of how the practices of The Wesleyan Church today relate to John Wesley's vision of a holy church that worships God "in spirit and in truth," and who, as a community of transformed people, share the love of God with the world.

Chapter one was an overview of my project, including its theological framework, which is based on the principles of practical theology, focusing on the interplay of lived experience and theology. Within this broad framework, my study focused on the practices of worship found in The Wesleyan Church, an understanding of Wesleyan theology as it pertains to divine action in individual lives and the life of the church, and the lived experience of a small group of people regarding these subjects. To further ground my focus, I reflected on Richard Osmer's "metatheoretical issues" that would influence my research. These issues are: 1) The theory-praxis relationship, 2) Sources of justification, 3) Models of cross-disciplinary work, and 4) Theological rationale. By determining these foundational issues prior to engaging in research, I was able to first identify my own biases and preunderstandings, which helped me to approach my research with a consistent basis from which to start.

Chapter two was an investigation of literature regarding Wesleyan theology, in particular, the topic of the role of experience in theological understanding; the doctrine of sanctification as

Wesley taught it and how it changed during the revivalistic milieu of nineteenth-century America; and Wesley's understanding of the means of grace as they are related to the previous two subjects. This chapter served as a foundation for analyzing the stories of my participants in relation to how they understood Wesleyan theology, and how the current espoused theology of The Wesleyan Church relates to formal Wesleyan theology.

The theological investigation continued in chapter three, turning the focus to corporate worship. It began with a general definition, and continued with a discussion of the necessity of community, or corporateness, in worship. There followed a section detailing the word "liturgy," revealing its meaning and importance to the worship of the church. This section also discussed the means of grace that are typically included in corporate worship as the link between the doctrine of sanctification and corporate worship, based on Wesley's advice to people searching for the experience of sanctification to "wait for it in the means which he hath ordained."[568] The final section of this chapter addressed the "other-orientedness" of corporate worship, centering on the participation of the church as the Body of Christ in the high priestly office of Christ for the world.

Chapter four introduced the methodology used for this thesis. Because I was looking for particular experiences of individuals, a quantitative, phenomenological approach was the most fitting approach. I presented a short overview of the field of phenomenology from Husserl through Heidegger to Gadamer. Following a Gadamerian approach, I acknowledged my preunderstandings so that I would be able to recognize them and take them into account when interviewing people as well as during the process of analyzing and writing about the interviews. My preunderstandings were always present, and influenced my interest in the research question, my choice of literature, and the types of questions I would ask my participants, My purpose, however, was to ensure that I would clearly hear my participants' voices. By using a Gadamerian hermeneutic approach in my interactions with the participants and later with their transcribed stories, I was able to present their experiences in a way that honored their particularity and added to the synthesis of the various aspects of my research. This chapter also explained the processes I used for collecting data and keeping it safe, necessary for the assurance of confidentiality, but also to guarantee the data I would present would be faithful to what I collected.

[568] Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons*, 162.

Chapter five provided an explanation of the first of Osmer's four tasks which he recommends for the practical theologian. This task is "descriptive-empirical," meaning it describes, or shares, the data in preparation for analysis. The chapter moved into the first, preliminary step of analysis by grouping the data into various categories that would allow me to analyze it further in relation to my research question.

Analysis is the purpose of Osmer's second task, interpretation. Chapter six was the first of two interpretive chapters which offered possible explanations for the causes of my participants' experiences. It was focused on interpreting the experiences from a scientific perspective. The insights gained from scholars in psychology, social anthropology, and neuroscience identify several ways in which human processes influence spiritual experiences. Chapter seven then continued the interpretive task by turning to theology to consider if my participants' experiences revealed the means of grace as the connection between corporate worship and sanctification. Combining the analysis of both chapters, some possibilities were found confirming the influence of worship practices on the experiences of my participants. However, there was a general lack of expressed understanding among my participants of the means of grace and the connection between worship and sanctification. The results were, in the end, mixed. While the participants were generally not aware of a connection between their worship practices and their transformational experiences, which appeared contrary to Wesleyan theology, that did not necessarily indicate that there was no influence. The ideas expressed in chapter six regarding how humans are influenced by their practices suggest that the regular participation of these people in corporate worship must have had an effect on them. In addition to these conclusions from science, based on my research into Wesleyan theology and liturgical/worship studies, it would be reasonable to expect that there would be a connection, despite the lack of recognition of it by my participants.

Chapter eight turned to Osmer's third task, which is normative, asking the question, "What ought to be going on?"[569] As a result of the research and analysis undertaken to this point, I identified several ways in which the espoused and operant theology of The Wesleyan Church no longer communicate the depth of meaning found in Wesley's theology. An observed result of this insufficient communication of Wesley's vision is that there is a reported disillusionment regarding the possibility of sanctification, and there is a lack of both understanding and intentional practice of the means of grace that have the potential to lead to

[569] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 8.

that transformation. I concluded that there are two things that "ought to be happening" in The Wesleyan Church. The first is that people in The Wesleyan Church ought to be familiar with the doctrine of sanctification. This doctrine should be presented as a message of hope available to all, freed from the restrictions passed down from revivalistic practices. The second is that worship services should be filled with purposeful practice of the means of grace that can be a conduit of sanctifying grace to the worshipers.

The final chapter of this thesis applies Osmer's "pragmatic task," which identifies strategies to improve practice to move towards desired goals.[570] In this chapter I focused on the two main findings of chapter eight. I recommended communicating the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification in ways that are appropriate for people in today's church. Additionally, detailed descriptions of the various means of grace found in corporate worship were offered, along with recommendations for including them as purposeful practices. I focused on the means recommended by Wesley: prayer, Scripture, the Lord's Supper, and Christian conference, but also included the "prudential" means that can be identified in other practices. An intentional focus on using the means of grace in corporate worship has the potential to provide opportunities for worshipers to experience God's sanctifying grace through the work of the Holy Spirit. This intentionality includes reflection on the way these practices communicate to the particular context of the local congregation.

In conclusion, this thesis has been a journey of discovery towards answering my research question: "If the content of the liturgy by which people worship week by week is claimed to be a means of grace, and therefore part of the key to the spiritual transformation of believers, can that theoretical connection be identified in the lived experience of Wesleyans today?" In the end, a tapestry emerged from the synthesis of the various areas of research pursued. The threads of traditional Wesleyan theology, liturgical and worship studies, and analysis of my participants' stories have been woven together by using the principals of practical theology to reveal a picture of what is happening in the lives of people in The Wesleyan Church today regarding this question. The resulting picture displays clear evidence of transformation in people's lives. However, the picture also shows that the understanding of the connection between that transformation and participation in the practices of corporate worship is not clear. The threads from my participants' stories that connect these concepts are weak. There is also evidence that in the espoused and operant theology of The Wesleyan Church an

[570] Ibid., 175–76.

understanding of Wesley's doctrine of the means of grace is weak, which may explain the lack of awareness of a connection between corporate worship and transformation.

The limited focus of this study could only treat a narrow slice of Wesleyan theology and theology related to worship and its practices. Within that narrow slice, my focus turned to the lived experience of only eleven people. Although it is a small study, these peoples' experiences of transformation reveal their understanding of a God who interacts with his people, meeting them in the specific times in their lives when transformation is needed, giving the Holy Spirit to work in them in ways that bring them closer to the image of their Lord. Their regular participation in corporate worship meant they were regularly in the presence of God in the context of the community of faith, which could very well have influenced their openness to the Holy Spirit's movement in their lives.

This project has focused on an area of research which does not have extensive precedent. There is extant literature that concentrates on the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification. There is also extant literature about liturgy and worship, but a smaller selection that approaches these subjects from a Wesleyan perspective. There are no studies that I have found which attempt to find a clear connection between the practices of corporate worship and a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification in the lived experience of people who belong to a Wesleyan-Holiness denomination. Thus, this study has added to the knowledge of this subject. For Wesleyan studies, it is useful to have some idea of how people experience the theology of the church that may be taken for granted by scholars and church leaders. For liturgical/worship studies, stories of people's experiences that highlight memorable experiences of corporate worship and also reveal those practices that are not mentioned can indicate which practices may need more attention for them to be meaningful to worshipers. Moving forward, further research with larger populations would be helpful in obtaining a clearer picture of what is happening across The Wesleyan Church. In the meantime, in light of my findings, I recommend a renewed emphasis on the doctrine of sanctification with the optimism expressed by John Wesley, and the inclusion of intentional, purposeful practices of corporate worship that act as means of grace in the lives of worshipers. I propose that spiritual transformation could become a more common occurrence in The Wesleyan Church by incorporating these recommendations.

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Preliminary questions for information – Make this just conversational, not like an interrogation.

- Tell me about your history with the Wesleyan Church.
- How often do you attend church?
- What is your level of participation in the worship services at your church? (Leader, pastor, attender, etc.)
- Are there any spiritual disciplines or activities that you practice on a regular basis outside of church?

1. **You are participating in this study because you believe you have had a spiritually transforming experience related to corporate worship. Can you tell me about that experience?**
2. Can you describe the worship services in your church? What do you look forward to when you go to church?
3. (If experience is in response to an altar call or invitation of some kind) Do you remember if there was anything leading up to the altar call that was speaking to you, or that you feel prepared you for your response?
4. How has the experience you have told me about affected your life?
5. What is your understanding of the word "sanctification?"
    a. Can you remember your pastor preaching about sanctification or holiness?

(Only for follow-up if they don't bring up the word. This would be something I would address in my analysis – their understanding of it isn't important. Their story is important.)

- Always ask for concrete examples
- Follow-up prompts:
    - Can you give me an example of that?
    - Tell me more
- Ask questions randomly – not in a list.
- Use question 1 as the main question and let the person talk. Ask more questions or prompts if needed.

APPENDIX B

Pastor's Letter

Dear Pastor _____,

As you may know, I'm studying for a PhD in practical theology at the University of Aberdeen. The working title of my dissertation is "The lived experience of spiritual transformation, as understood in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition, precipitated by corporate worship: a phenomenological study."

John Wesley considered regular participation in corporate worship to be a means of grace, providing an avenue for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of Christians who participate on a regular basis. My project is to seek for people's experiences that relate to this belief.

Central to this research will be interviews with people in Wesleyan churches who have had experiences that they would classify as spiritually transformational, related to their participation in corporate worship services. My hope is that by hearing the stories of people who have had this type of experience, I will get a sense of the worship practices in Wesleyan churches that contribute to the spiritual formation and transformation of people attending our services, resulting in recommendations that will be helpful for pastors and worship leaders.

My question for you is this: When Phil and I come to speak at your church about our work with Global Partners in the Philippines, would it be okay if I spend a few minutes explaining my project and recruiting volunteers for interviews? I would do it in a way that would not single anyone out, but would give them a chance to respond to me privately so I can call or email them to explain the project more fully, and to set up an interview if they meet the requirements and they decide they would like to participate.

I appreciate the support of your church for the work God has called us to do. I am praying that God will use this research to enhance the mission of churches to grow disciples, both here in the U.S. and around the world. Thank you for your consideration.

Co-laborer in the Kingdom,

Becky

APPENDIX C

Participation Form

Participation in Becky Davis's Research

Corporate Worship and Spiritual Transformation

Filling out this form is not a commitment. It just means you're interested, and I'll follow up with you.

Name_____ Date _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Email_____ Phone _____

If you're not sure today, you may take this form home and contact me at becky.davis@gponline or (704) 460-7791 or to learn more.

APPENDIX D

Follow-up Email and Participant Information Sheet

1. Text of follow-up email sent to participants

Dear ****,
Thank you so much for your interest in my PhD project. I have attached an information document for you to read. I want to be sure you understand what I'm planning to do. If there is anything in this document you don't understand, or if you have any questions, I would be happy to help you. You can either reply to this email, or you can call me at ***-***-****. Sometime next week, starting July 5th, I will be calling all of the volunteers to set up times for individual interviews. My plan is to meet at your church, because the University of Aberdeen requires some safety precautions regarding COVID-19, and they will not allow me to interview people in their homes. I need to finish all the interviews no later than August 5th. If you could add me to the contacts in your phone with the number above, that would be great. I know many people don't answer unknown numbers, so I would like to avoid the inevitable phone message game of tag.

Again, thank you for being willing to share your story with me. I'm looking forward to hearing it!

In His Service,
Becky Davis

Attachment: Participant Information Sheet.docx

2. Information sheet for potential participants

Corporate Worship and Spiritual Transformation

You have been invited to participate in a research study. This document explains my research project, methodology, storage of data and contact information for both myself and my immediate supervisor. This document is for your information and does not need to be returned to me.

Purpose of the study
The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experience of Wesleyans who have participated regularly in corporate worship over an extended period of time, and feel they have experienced spiritual transformation as a result of this participation. This research is part of my doctoral thesis being written at the University of Aberdeen. My study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee in the School of Divinity, History & Philosophy at the University of Aberdeen.

What to expect if you participate

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in an in-depth interview, lasting anywhere from 60-90 minutes. We will plan to meet at your church or other location that will allow for COVID-19 safety measures required by the University of Aberdeen. This will include adequate ventilation, available hand sanitizer, sanitized surfaces, and adequate space for us to sit at least 6 feet apart. I am fully vaccinated. If you are not vaccinated, we will both wear masks to further protect you. We will schedule our interview for a time that is mutually convenient, before my return to the Philippines scheduled for August 7th. During the interview, I will ask you questions that directly relate to the purpose of this study; namely, questions that seek to understand your experience of corporate worship and spiritual transformation. This interview will be recorded.

Privacy and data storage

Because this research is designed for a PhD thesis, any portion may be published, either independently or as a whole with other chapters of the thesis. The confidentiality of all participants will be strictly upheld, and identities of participants, the particular churches they attend, the cities where they live, and names of any other persons spoken of in the interview will never be revealed in any part of the written work (or any related publications involving the research). All recorded, electronic data will be stored temporarily on an encrypted device, and long-term on a password-protected personal drive on a secure server at the University of Aberdeen. All paper copies of consent forms and written data will be scanned and stored on the same secure server. When they are securely saved electronically, the paper copies will be destroyed. All data will be securely stored for the duration of five years, and will be safely and promptly destroyed thereafter.

Possible risks of participating

There is very low risk anticipated for those who participate in this study. However, you may find that discussing your experiences of spiritual transformation may evoke an emotional response. Therefore, I will be attuned to your comfort and well-being throughout the interview process. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, I will stop the interview and confirm if you are willing to continue. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to stop the interview at any time, if you so choose.

Possible benefits of participating

You may have had an experience during a worship service that you would consider transformational, but you didn't know how to categorize what happened. Talking about the experience may help you to clarify your thoughts and feelings about it. It may also serve to clarify and deepen your understanding of Wesleyan theology regarding corporate worship and spiritual transformation. In the larger picture, the story of your lived experience could help pastors and worship leaders in the future to be able to provide worship experiences that have the potential to precipitate spiritual transformation in the people who participate in those services.

Contact information

If you would like further information, or if you need to provide me with any further information, I would be very glad to hear from you. You can reach me at: r.davis.20@abdn.ac.uk or by phone at (704) 460-7791. (As of August 7th, 2021, I will be in

the Philippines, on Beijing Time. You may reach me there at 704-259-7245.) My supervisor, Professor Léon Van Ommen, can be reached at leon.vanommen@abdn.ac.uk.

Thank you so much for your participation in my study!

Rebecca Davis - r.davis.20@abdn.ac.uk

King's College
School of Divinity, History & Philosophy
University of Aberdeen
AB24 3DS
United Kingdom

APPENDIX E

Consent Form

Consent form for participants

Corporate Worship and Spiritual Transformation

The purpose of my study is to explore the lived experience of Wesleyans who have participated regularly in corporate worship over an extended period of time, and who feel they have experienced spiritual transformation as a result of this participation. I hope to identify and recommend to pastors and worship leaders the aspects of corporate worship that may have led to such experiences of spiritual transformation. To accomplish this, we will meet together for 60-90 minutes so I can explore some questions with you regarding your experiences. We will set up the interview at a time of mutual convenience.

Informed Consent (P*lease check the corresponding box by each statement if you agree*):
 I have been appropriately informed about the nature of this research.
 I consent to participate in this study, understanding that I can choose not to answer a question, or to end the interview at any time.
 I consent to have the interview recorded to ensure that my views are accurately recorded for the purposes of this research.

Name (printed):_____

Signature:_____

Date:_____

Anonymity
The researcher will ensure that any quotations from this interview, used in her doctoral thesis and/or future publications, will be kept anonymous, and your identity and the identities of any person, church or geographical location mentioned during your interview will be protected.

Further information
If you'd like any further information, or would like to provide me with any other information after this interview, I would be glad to hear from you. You can contact me at r.davis.20@abdn.ac.uk or by phone at (704) 259-7245. (As of August 7th, 2021, I will be in the Philippines, on Beijing time.) The supervisor of this doctoral project is Professor Léon Van Ommen, Divinity and Religious Studies, King's College, University of Aberdeen, AB24 3UB, leon.vanommen@abdn.ac.uk.

APPENDIX F

Ethical Approval Email

DAVIS, REBECCA (PGR)

From: Arts, Social Sciences & Business Ethics Approval System <no-reply@sharepointonline.com>
Sent: Monday, June 28, 2021 4:45 AM
To: DAVIS, REBECCA (PGR)
Cc: Cecolin, Alessandra; Cross, Katie; Foster, Dawn
Subject: Your application for ethical approval has been approved

Dear Colleague,

You have received this email because you recently submitted an application for ethical approval of a research proposal.

The Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business reviewer has considered your application and given approval that in their best judgement, all ethical considerations within the research proposal have been addressed adequately. You can now begin work on your research. Any comments made by the reviewer are copied below.

If, for the purposes of external funders (or other external reviewers) you require a formal letter confirming this approval, please contact your School Ethics Officer in the first instance.

Title: The lived experience of spiritual transformation, as understood in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition, precipitated by corporate worship: a phenomenological study

SEO: Cross, Katie

SEO Comments: I am happy to approve this application, which considers key issues of data creation and security as well as the safety and informed consent of participants. I note the addition of an exemption request for Tier 2 F2F research, which seems reasonable. The researcher outlines in detail the safety measures that will be taken to ensure that the research is covid-19 complient in their place of research.

Committee Reviewer: Arnason, Dr Arnar

Committee Comments: I agree with the SEO and am happy to approve this application. Regular ethical concerns have been addressed as well as safety issues regarding the ongoing pandemic. Exemption Committee has give its approval regarding the latter.

[This is an automatic e-mail - please do not reply]

APPENDIX G

COVID-19 Safety Questions

- **Name of applicant on the ethics application:**

  Rebecca Davis

- **The title and ethics reference number (if applicable) of your study:**

  The lived experience of spiritual transformation, as understood in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition, precipitated by corporate worship: a phenomenological study

- **Which University building the study will take place in, along with room number(s):**

  Off campus

- **The number of volunteers that are going to participate in this study on a daily/weekly/monthly basis:**

  10-15 volunteers. Each volunteer will participate in one 60-90 minute interview.

- **Are these volunteers (students/staff) already on campus or are they coming from elsewhere?:**

  N/A

- **Details of building and room entrance and egress arrangements for volunteers (including how you will meet volunteers on arrival and how volunteers will be safely helped to exit at the end of their visit):**

  I will meet volunteers in their local church buildings. Entrance and exit doors will be the same as those which the congregation uses on Sundays. There will be hand sanitizer available at the doors. If volunteers are not vaccinated I will ask them to wear a mask when entering and exiting, in case other people are in the area.

  Only one person will be interviewed at a time. I will schedule interviews so no one will be waiting outside the interview room. Hand sanitizer will also be available in the interview room.

  I will let the participants know which room in the church we'll be using. I'll be there early, so they can come in by themselves and meet me in the room. They can also leave by themselves, using the same doors they entered. Interviews will be scheduled during the week, when there won't be many people using the church building.

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