

# A WESLEYAN VISION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

**At the heart of the universe there is a heart of grace.** This grace is offered to all, even before we become aware of God or our need for his mercy. None is deserving of this grace, but none are excluded from God's generous offer of life in Christ. This is what we call prevenient grace—God's wooing of us before we even know him.

This prevenient grace takes expression in the goodness of God's creation, which provides for our needs and which creates within us a sense of wonder and joy. This grace also shows itself in the order and majesty of the universe, which points us to a Creator. And this grace is also demonstrated in our own human nature, formed in the image of God, with a conscience that tells us that we are moral beings, fearfully and wonderfully made. At the same time, it makes us aware that we are unable to live by what we know to be right – that we require forgiveness and mercy. God's grace penetrates our denial and self-justification to awaken us to the reality that we are inherently self-centered and prone to hurt others and violate our conscience in order to get what we want.

This gracious heart of God has provided for our salvation with the life, death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. Seeing us in our need and in our sinful rebellion, God's love for us was not diminished or deterred. Instead, he provided the precious gift of his divine Son, who became human, lived a sinless life, and who offered his life on the cross as a ransom for all. It is this kind and powerful act that provides for the forgiveness of our sins, an abundant life in this world—including the presence and the witness of the Holy Spirit within us assuring us that we are children of God, adopted into his family—and eternal life in the world to come. This gift of new life with all its benefits is received by faith and secured solely by the atoning work of Christ on our behalf. This is what we call justifying grace—God providing a way for us to come into right relationship with him.

Though salvation is a gift, it is expected that all who receive this gift will respond with a heart of gratitude expressed in service to God and others and in a commitment to being transformed in heart and life into the image of Christ. Christ's bodily resurrection and ascension into heaven demonstrate God's ability to break the power of sin and death that hold sway over our lives, opening the way for us to become a new person. The transformation of fallen human beings into the likeness of God's Son is also a work of God's grace in our lives. We must "work out our own salvation" by cooperating with the work of God's Spirit within us – but even the desire for transformation is God-given, as is the ability to serve God and others. Our Wesleyan faith holds that we may grow in grace, until finally we

are fully sanctified in heart and in life. This is what we call sanctifying grace—God working in us to make us holy.

**At the heart of the universe there is a heart of righteousness.** It is a heart that not only desires but also requires that the children of God become holy, for “without holiness no one shall see the Lord.” Personal righteousness or holiness is a daily living out of the new life we have in Jesus Christ, living as he did. The way of righteousness is the way of grace, but it is the way of a disciplined grace. The means of grace are offered, so that the good work begun in us might be brought to completion. Worship, the reading of Scripture, prayer, fasting, holy communion, service to others and accountability to others in the body of Christ are offered to us as ways of sowing to the Spirit, that we might reap a harvest of righteousness.

God’s heart of righteousness also expects that his children will labor to make this present world more like the Kingdom of God. Social holiness is not separate from or contrary to personal holiness. In fact, the transformation of a fallen culture into a world that is just and merciful is incumbent upon all who know the One who is both righteous and gracious. Those who know Christ will care for the poor and the dispossessed and will confront the powers and the human structures that create oppression and injustice, just as he did.

The work of personal and social holiness is best done in community. One of the earliest lessons we learn about human beings in Scripture is that it is not good for any of us to be alone. We are relational beings and we grow emotionally and spiritually as we are connected with others in open and authentic relationships. Bearing one another’s burdens, learning to serve others above ourselves, giving and asking for forgiveness when necessary, loving when we would rather turn away, and allowing others to confront us with our sins and failures – these are the ways that we are truly human together, and these are ways that we are transformed into the image of the One who was God among us. It is also together that we learn to confront and receive the wisdom and courage to face the principalities and powers that make our world oppressive and destructive to those who are marginalized and powerless.

**At the heart of the universe there is the heart of God** – a God who desires to relate to us in a personal way, transforming our lives into the image of his Son Jesus, and who desires for his kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. God’s heart is a heart of grace and righteousness. And to be faithful to his calling on our lives, we must also possess hearts of grace and righteousness, together being his instruments of transformation in a lost and broken world.