

Putting it all Together in the Wesleyan Way

3 Simple Steps of Grace #8

Galatians 5:5-9 LUMC 03-08-2020

Theme: Committing to Christ in Faith

In Northern Arizona, the Babbitt Ranch was a bit like the Ponderosa and the Cartwrights. Babbitts for years had the corner on beef, hardware, and trade with the Navajo and Hopi. The ranch is still held by the family but operated by a manager instead of directly by family. Some things never change though. when it comes time to sell, cowboys still ride horses into the rugged ravines and hills to track down all the cattle and drive them to holding corrals. There was a day when the cattle were brought to Flagstaff and the train for shipping, but those cattle and sheep drives are remnants of another age. Today, the cattle truck takes center stage transporting the cattle to various markets and eventually to your bar-b-que.

The “round-up.” For seven weeks we’ve been taking some trails in the wilderness of theology and discipleship to explore some of the basics of our faith. While we “round-up” this discussion, I know that I’ve left out some key parts of our faith and we’ll cover them next week and through Easter. Jesus left us some instructions, I am calling the 3 Simple Steps of Grace, in which Jesus said, Love God, then go and love others as yourself and make disciples. The blanks yet to fill are the essentials of Christianity found the in the Trinity and include the birth, life, death, and bodily resurrection of Jesus and just why that is essential.

As we begin our round-up, we’ll go back to week 1 and the first step of grace, where we found ourselves in the Old Testament and God’s instructions to: “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**” (Deuteronomy 6:4) The Shema, or ‘hearing prayer’ reminds us to listen to God and to love him. In our Wesleyan way, we understand God’s love through his grace and we see grace in a sort of “trilogy”; **Prevenient**; God’s grace going ahead of us to prepare us, **Justifying**; God forgiving our sin and freeing us from the result of sin – death, and **Sanctifying**; God’s work through the Holy Spirit in us to purify us. We realize that, “**while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**” (Romans 5:8)

Then, in the second step of grace, we saw that when loving others and loving God intersect, the Holy Spirit can begin to transform us into the people God created us to truly be and the fruit of this intersection is, “**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.**” (Galatians 5) For Wesley, this meant three simple rules; Do no harm, do good, stay in love with God. Loving others is good work but must also maintain and nurture our love for God for our sake and so that we are able to love the unloveables as Jesus did. This second step is our

“faith in action” it is where the rubber hits the road for our **“faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”** (James 2:17).

Once you have accepted Jesus in faith and you fall into God’s love, your natural response is to offer love and grace to others. This is the transformation of the Holy Spirit outwardly expressed even as the inward grace of transformation continues. Yet, Wesley’s three rules are just the floor, the beginning of our walk of discipleship. Sadly, many Christians never even get to the floor before they get stuck and fail to grow.

The third step of grace, Make Disciples, bears the greatest danger and the greatest joys. Discipleship without God may result in cult behavior and is not the Christian life. We realized that discipleship to Jesus is always risky because God calls us to new life and into uncharted territory. In Romans 10, Paul notes; **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** But then he poses the question, **“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?”** Remember, you are not called to convert people, but to share your faith enabling God to transform them through his work of grace.

As we “make disciples,” we enter into **“accountable discipleship”** in the Wesleyan way. You must be engaged in a small group somewhere as a regular part of your walk of faith. In this small group, there must be trust, discretion, and love enabling accountability. Whether a Bible study, ‘Life Group’, Emmaus reunion group, or something else you have together with two or more, there must be an intentionality of study, action, and worship where you are accountable to the others and they to you.

Our driving verse for this kind of action is Acts 1:8, **“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

By the way, who are you praying for?

That’s our roundup and in the diagram we have been using three circles for Love God, Love Others, and Make Disciples which, when we keep balance in our lives, overlap and form a “sweet spot” where the work of kingdom building takes place. This is a place where the power of the Holy Spirit is evident in abundance and where the fruit of the Spirit grows on this vine we call the ‘church’ and were we remain firmly connected to Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Why, then do we not see discipleship and kingdom growth like we see in Acts where Peter, the foot-in-mouth-walking on water- Jesus denying-Jesus forgiven-Holy Spirit empowered, yes, that Peter, who speaks of God’s love and grace and three thousand people step forward to become disciples? Why? I think there are many reasons, but let’s examine a few:

1. You have been taught not to talk about your faith. You might offend someone. If God healed and freed you and you claim Jesus as Lord, and the Holy Spirit abides in you then who cares if someone is offended?
 - a. That offense is not of God! There is only one who is offended by God and sadly many are his disciples. Yes, be gentle, compassionate, and respectful, but do not be muzzled by offense. We must pray against this spirit of offense that God's freedom be heard. You have and you are the good news of Jesus.
2. Our American culture has taught you it is wrong to fail and if you try something and fail there is something wrong with you. What's wrong is that whole message! Success is not even yours to be had, it all belongs to God. To him be all the glory! In a letter on August 26, 1779, John Wesley wrote, "Remember, you will be rewarded according to your labor, not according to your success." A man may plant corn for the harvest this year but a visionary plants a tree from which the next generation will harvest fruit. How much risk is there in being kind, generous, and just?
 - a. Fear of risk is not of God! We need to foster both a culture where failure is celebrated for failure tells us what to correct next time, and a culture where we don't expect success immediately. As you plant seeds of faith, you may occasionally discover you are blessed to help with the harvest.
3. We live in a post-Christian era. We must face that head-on, sleeves rolled up, armed for the work of kingdom building. "If you build it, they will come" church planting has ended. Growing the kingdom is every disciple's job, every day and God will provide the courage for you.
 - a. How often have I heard a parent say about their child and faith, "I'm going to let them decide when they want." Let me go back to Romans 10, "**How can they believe in the one in whom they have not heard?**" Stop expecting someone else, like a pastor to do this. Be gentle, compassionate, kind, and respectful, but plant those seeds of faith and share your faith.

The Galatian church had run out of gas. They were in serious difficulty. Others were trying to tell them what to do, giving false witness, teachers were off the rail, it was time to get back on the track toward holiness – toward Jesus. In Galatians 5 Paul said, "**The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love**" and asks the question, "**You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.**"