

BRMC Small Group Study: Holy Spirit Session 7

Leader's Guide

Please note that the suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study. Feel free to adapt the questions for your group.

Scripture Passage:

Focus: 1 Peter 1:13-2:3

Supplementary: 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and 4:7-8

Open to the Spirit:

Focus chapter: 18

Supplementary chapters: 17 and 20

Context:

Holiness is a grace accorded by the Holy Spirit and is a necessary part of Christian life, however, it may be misunderstood. The focus chapter seeks to set a working definition of holiness, what it means to be holy, and how we can be holy. The emphasis that Methodists accord "entire sanctification" or "Christian perfection" will also be discussed in this context a little beyond what McKnight writes in the focus chapter.

The focus passage (1 Peter 1:13-2:3, read with 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and 4:7-8) emphasises the need to be holy, because God is holy. As Christians, we rely on the hope of the grace given to us so that we can resist conforming to the ways of the world, we can live consistently in the fear of the Lord, because we have been washed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The essence of our ability to live holy lives is premised on our hope in Christ and what Christ has accomplished for us on the cross, the grace given us by the Holy Spirit, and the daily desire to live obedient, reverent, devoted lives to our God.

Lesson Objectives:

- Holiness comes from the Holy Spirit.
- Holiness is being in the presence of God, devoted entirely to God, to the exclusion of anything that is not of God.
- We need a desire to be holy and the practice of spiritual disciplines to facilitate our openness to the Spirit and the presence of God and the Spirit's transformational work in us.

Introductory

1. In the focus passage (e.g. in 1 Peter 1:16) and the supplementary passages, are Christians called to be holy? Who calls us to be holy and who empowers us to be holy?
 - God calls us to be holy (to holiness) because God is holy. It is God the Holy Spirit that sanctifies us and makes us holy. It is by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, His one perfect sacrifice that we are made clean, we are born again (1 Peter 1:23-24).

2. What are the key elements of holiness identified in the focus passage?

- It first starts in the mind: we have to open our mind, to be alert and fully sober (v13). It requires faith: to rest upon the grace given (v13). To not conform to the world but to live holy as God is holy.
- Our daily conduct becomes important (v17): to live in fear (reverence) of our God, to affirm our hope in our redemption by the blood of our Saviour, to live in obedience of the truth through the Holy Spirit (this purifies our soul), live in sincere love for the brothers and sisters, lay aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and all evil speaking, desire the nourishment of the word, desire growth, actually taste that the Lord is gracious.

Reflection

3. What does holiness mean to you?

- The people in your group may have different views on what holiness means to them. Most may well believe that it is simply being set apart for God without really understanding what that means.
- McKnight writes: "The word holiness means to be in God's presence as one 'devoted to God,' and because of devotion to God it also means 'to be separated from the world.' This dual meaning strikes the right biblical balance. God is holy. To be with God, to be devoted to God, and to walk with God mean that the companion of God is separated from the world. Devotion to God entails the rejection of devotion to the world. But rejecting the world is not the primary emphasis. Holiness is first and 'foremost devotion to God.'" (p 149)

4. If we are called to be holy (entirely devoted to God), do you think it is attainable in this life? What do you understand by 'Christian Perfection (also known as Entire Sanctification)', which is a key pillar of Methodist theology?

- McKnight suggests that in the Holiness tradition (which Methodists subscribe to), the emphasis is "on surrender, turning from worldliness, and deepening one's personal spiritual life". (p 152) He shares the story of Phoebe Palmer (p 159) who was known as a world-famous evangelist and teacher of utter devotion to God. Palmer wrote of an occasion where she felt the Spirit was leading her "into a solemn, most sacred, and inviolable compact" with her soul and God, where she would be united in perfect oneness with Jesus, the result of which was unquestioning allegiance from her, and salvation, guidance and protection from God. And the result of this transformational encounter was love for God, love for others, " model of Spirit-generated holiness" (p 152)
- For Palmer, it would appear that holiness is attainable.
- Wesley defined Christian perfection in "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" (1777) as follows:

"In one view, it is purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God. It is the giving God all our heart; it is one desire and design ruling all our tempers. It

is the devoting, not a part, but all our soul, body, and substance to God. In another view, it is all the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked. It is the circumcision of the heart from all filthiness, all inward as well as outward pollution. It is a renewal of the heart in the whole image of God, the full likeness of Him that created it. In yet another, it is the loving God with all our heart, and our neighbour as ourselves."

- It may be useful to refer to FAQs on these topics from the [Methodist Church of Singapore website <here>](#)

Extracted with some revision below:

Q: I have also heard of "entire sanctification". What is this?

A: Entire sanctification is a term used to describe the teaching of John Wesley called "Christian Perfection". Echoing Jesus Christ's counsel, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48), Wesley believed that we can be perfect in this world.

Q: That seems unattainable. Can it really be possible?

A: It is important to make a distinction between being sanctified (which is to sin less and less) and being entirely sanctified (which is the doctrine in question). To be entirely sanctified is for the heart to be in a condition such that one is able to love God and neighbour without any love for self. This sanctification is "entire" and "perfect" in the sense that it is a completed work – this is the goal towards which we have been straining towards in the journey.

This Wesleyan teaching of perfection does not refer to a person who has become sinless. The process of sanctification, is to remind us that we have been called to sin less and not to be sinless which is impossible in this fallen world.

Q: So what's "sanctifying grace"?

A: Every Christian has access to God's spiritual resources to be energised and enabled by God's sanctifying grace. This is the grace which plants greater desire and deeper conviction in a Christian for that Christian to follow the teachings and moral vision of God's Kingdom. The evidence of God's sanctifying grace at work in a person is the transformation of that person's life over a period of time.

- McKnight speaks holiness to mean, "that in this world one listens and dances to the music of the Holy Spirit instead of the music of the world." (p 150)
- It might be useful also to refer back to the focus passage and what the passage refers to for the means of holy living. It harks back to the idea of total devotion to God and to the hope we have in Christ and His redeeming work.

5. Do you desire to live a holy life?

- This question is an opportunity to gather the thoughts of the members of your group to focus, not on the discouragement, but on the next set of questions ... to prepare them to commit to a habit of seeking Christian perfection.

- This question also seeks to bring attention to whether each person desires a vision of holiness. In the previous questions, we explored what holiness might look like, and now, the question seeks to summarise their thoughts on a vision for holiness for them.
- Even before we look at spiritual disciplines in the next question, we must acknowledge that “[o]n their own, these practices don’t accomplish the proper results. For these disciplines to do their proper work, we need to practice them as we are open to God’s Spirit. In other words, the spiritual disciplines are practices that are designed to make us open to the Spirit and open to the presence of God, but they are not the spirit.” (p 151)

Application

6. How might you live a holy life, day to day?

- This question seeks to give an opportunity for people to take steps to actively seek Spirit-generated holiness. You may suggest to the group to consider adopting the Wesleyan Rule of Life:
 1. Do no evil
 2. Do all the good you can
 3. Maintain the ordinances of God

These were the basic rules that all Methodists committed to, if they wanted to be part of a Methodist Society. The idea was to cultivate holiness of life.

More information on the Rules of Life can be found at:

- UMC Discipleship: http://gbod-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/kintera-files/covenant-discipleship/2015_UMRuleOfLife_Pamphlet.pdf
- Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living: https://www.amazon.com/Three-Simple-Rules-Wesleyan-Living/dp/0687649668/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=three+simple+rules+wesleyan+reading&qid=1581994157&sr=8-1

7. How might the small group, as a community or family in Christ play a role in living a holy life, day to day?

- This question seeks to give an opportunity for people to take steps to actively seek Spirit-generated holiness.
- Within the small group can we help each other in the aspects of holiness that we have discussed above? How might we do this?
- In 1738 John Wesley wrote the *Rules for the Band Societies*. In this he states, “The design of our meeting is, to obey that command of God, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.” Wesley gives a list of suggested questions to search the soul of those in attendance, but there were five mandatory questions that had to be asked to each person in attendance:
 1. What sin have you committed since our last Meeting?

2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be Sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?

More information on Class Meetings may be found from this book:

- Class Meetings: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience: https://www.amazon.com/Class-Meeting-Kevin-Watson/dp/162824058X/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Class-Meeting-Reclaiming-Forgotten-Experience&qid=1581996779&sr=8-1
- It was important for people to reflect on whether they were living holy lives during the course of the week and to be accountable to one another to walk in holiness.
 - Would smaller accountability groups be useful for your small group? Or perhaps spiritual friendship groups (see Tan Soo-Inn, *3-2-1: Following Jesus in Threes*, which can be reviewed at <https://graceworks.com.sg/store/category/spiritual-friendship/3-2-1-following-jesus-in-threes/>).

Prayer

8. Write out a prayer for yourself based on what you have heard and learned from this session, and for your application steps.
 - It may be useful to break into smaller groups, or to keep within the small groups for the sharing above.
 - Allow some time for people to process what they have heard and learned from the Holy Spirit. Then encourage them to share with one another what their prayer is for this session, and for themselves for the week.
 - It is always useful to collate these prayers and to refer to them for thanksgiving and sharing next week.
 - If it is appropriate, suggest to members to write down specific instances when they feel the Spirit at work in them and through them. This aims to help them become more aware of the Spirit's presence in their lives.