

Living Word Small Group Study Guide

June 28-July 4, 2020

Sermon Series: The People Called Methodists

Week Three: “Wesley and God”

Study groups can choose to use the daily Scripture readings and associated questions from either the current or previous week’s Daily Study Guide, or to focus on the Scripture reading from Sunday’s sermon. This study guide delves more deeply into the Scripture from the Sunday sermon.

Suggested Opening Prayer:

Both the opening and closing prayer are offered as suggestions. Feel free to offer spontaneous prayer instead.

Lord Jesus Christ, You have shown us what it means to be a servant. We ask now for Your grace and strength to faithfully follow in the footsteps of servanthood. We pray in the name and spirit of Jesus. Amen.

Sermon Series Theme:

What makes United Methodism different? While sharing in the fundamental beliefs of broader Christianity, there are certain beliefs of “the people called Methodists” that make us unique.

This Week’s Sermon Theme:

The view of God that dominates Wesleyan theology is that of a loving father/parent wanting to reassure His children with regard to His relationship with them.

Sunday Scripture Reading: Luke 12:22-32 (A group member should read the passage aloud).

For Group Discussion:

What does the text actually SAY?

The goal of this discussion is to make sure group members understand the actual content of the passage.

What four things does Jesus explicitly tell His disciples not to worry about? (12:22)

Why does Jesus say not to worry just about those things? (12:23)

How do ravens serve as an example of God’s loving providence? (12:24)

What value does Jesus place on worrying? (12:25-26)

How do lilies serve as an example of God’s loving providence? (12:27-28)

Why should we not worry about clothing, or what we will eat, or what we will drink? (12:29-30)

What should we do first, which will result in these things being taken care of as well? (12:31)

Why, ultimately, should we not be afraid? What has our Father given us? (12:32)

What questions does the text raise for us?

The goal of this discussion is to allow group members to respond to their own emotions and reactions related to the passage. Encourage participants to simply ask any questions they have about the passage. The questions below are only suggestions, representative of the kinds of questions that might be asked. The goal is not necessarily to provide answers, but to ask questions of the text! Open discussion about the questions raised below, or by the class, is encouraged.

We might wonder if Jesus is really commanding us never to worry. Is that even possible?

We might also wonder why Jesus specifically singles out what to eat and what to wear as examples of human worry. Do people worry more about them than other things?

We might also ask how much comfort we are really expected to find in the fact that birds manage to find something to eat, and that lilies have pretty blossoms.

We might ask if it really means we have “little faith” if we worry about *anything*.

We probably wonder if there’s a reason Jesus specifically refers to God as “our Father” here, when He talks about God providing us with what we need.

We could wonder, is it true that if we “seek God’s Kingdom,” we will receive all these other things we worry about. Is Jesus speaking metaphorically here?

Finally, we probably wonder what it really means to say “The Father has been please to give you the Kingdom.” In what sense is the “Kingdom” ours? How exactly does knowing that help to alleviate our worries?

Commentary on the text:

The goal of this section is to provide further background that provides context for the content of the passage.

See also: Luke 12:4; Luke 12:11; Luke 12:13-21

Taken by itself, Jesus’ teaching on worry and anxiety seems to serve primarily as a lesson on God’s providence. The primary teaching point seems to be “don’t worry about things, because God will take care of you.” Verses 30 and 31 of the passage even say as much, nearly outright. But there is more to the passage than simply a teaching about God’s providence – as important a teaching as that is! To see more deeply into what Jesus is getting at in this passage, we need to look a bit closer at the context provided in the earlier parts of the chapter.

Notice, first, that even though today’s passage is usually set off in modern Bibles with a heading like “Do Not Worry” (in the NIV and NRSV) or “Warning about Worry” (in the CEB), two other verses ahead of this passage also have Jesus advising against worry – it’s not a brand new topic for Him as the headings might imply! In 12:4, Jesus has told His disciples “Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body,” and in 12:11, He has said “do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say.” Fear and anxiety among the disciples have been the focal point of Jesus’ teaching throughout this

chapter – primarily, anxiety about life itself. Jesus is addressing the fundamental human problem of worrying about our lives.

But notice also how the parable of the rich fool, in verses 13-21, addresses the problem of worry, a bit more indirectly, as well. In the parable, Jesus confronts head-on how most of us try to deal with this anxiety about life – through the accumulation of possessions! The rich fool thinks he can overcome his worry by building bigger and bigger storehouses in which to store his crops – and that having all this will allow him, one day, to “take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:20). What he doesn’t know is that he doesn’t have those years ahead of him at all – his life will end that very night. The parable leads directly into Jesus’ advice about not worrying about what we eat or what we wear. For Luke, worrying about our present and our future usually leads to one thing – the uncontrolled growth of our desire to acquire wealth, which we think will “take care of us” in our advancing years. But Jesus insists that our wealth, our “things,” are even more fragile than our lives. The only thing that will *really* help us to overcome our fear is to learn that life is not made secure through the possession of wealth, but by coming to see that life is a gift given to us by God, and that God, the omnipotent God of the Universe, *wants* us to live and *provides* for our living! One of the best ways to learn that, Jesus insists, is to dispose of our possessions, to find that our loving Father really is still providing for us. Even if we face death, we can face it knowing our Father is providing for us.

And that really is the point. Look at the ravens, Jesus says, look at the flowers. God takes care of them! Now, Jesus does not deny that birds and flowers will some day die. In fact, he even makes the point that the flowers are thrown into the fire and consumed. We, too, will one day physically die, and worrying about it won’t add a second, or a minute, or an hour to our span of life. But those who follow Jesus should know that they have been given the assurance of *eternal* life, and that should make all the difference.

Jesus refers to God as “your Father” twice at the end of this teaching to emphasize the fact that God looks at us as His children. While we are running around worrying about what’s going to happen to our lives, our Father has already given us an incredible gift. “Your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom” (Luke 12:32). As followers of Jesus, the eternal Kingdom of God is our possession. Knowing this, we can live without fear. Knowing this, we can even be bold enough to share with others the possessions that everyone else *thinks* will provide them with security! God, like any father who is concerned about His children’s future, has already taken steps to ensure their security, and it has nothing to do with storehouses or wealth. Even when our lives are threatened (as in Jesus’ teaching at the beginning of the chapter), we can live without fear, without worry, without anxiety, because our Father has promised us, we already have been given His kingdom. Life in that Kingdom is a secure life, free from worldly worries, even here and now.

Final Thoughts for Discussion:

The goal of this section is to get people thinking and talking about how the passage should affect their behavior after they leave the group.

What kinds of things do you worry about?

Why do you think you worry about them?

Do you think there's a difference between everyday concern about our children, our careers, our finances, or our relationships and the worry Jesus is talking about? Do we ever view those things as our source of security?

How do you think this week's teaching is related to last week's study on salvation, and the fact that we really can be assured of our eternal destinies? What, ultimately, is Jesus trying to give us assurance about?

Did your parents care about your future security? If you have children, do you care about theirs?

How do you think the fact that God relates to us as a Father is meant to affect our understanding of our future security? Would you get the same assurance from a more impersonal metaphor, like "your King knows that you need them"? Why does Jesus use relational metaphors in referring to God?

And yet, what does the promise of receiving "our Father's Kingdom" imply about the magnitude of what God gives us?

How willingly are you able to dispose of your possessions in light of Jesus' teaching here?

Suggested Closing Prayer:

Loving Father, we give You thanks for the gift of eternal life, and for entrusting Your Kingdom to us. Help us to live free from worry and anxiety, secure in the knowledge that You have done everything necessary to provide for our security both now, and for all eternity. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.