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“LEADERSHIP AND THE WESLEYAN PERSPECTIVE”**

**ABSTRACT**

This paper will attempt to draw out some contemporary leadership lessons from the life and ministry of John Wesley. Since the academic discipline of leadership is a relatively recent phenomenon, not a lot has been written on the intersection of Wesley and leadership. However, there is no doubt that Wesley was a true leader. He was an organizational genius and his innate gifts of discipline and energy propelled his own movement in England and provided the seeds of an explosive and vital religious movement in America. As the heirs of his life and ministry, it is worth the time and effort to draw out any leadership conclusions we come to as we explore Wesley’s thoughts and deeds.

**INTRODUCTION**

A fundamental question presents itself from the very start of this paper: Why write on the topic of leadership and John Wesley? The obvious answer comes from the explosion of leadership studies from the secular business and management perspective. Chasing after increased profits and growth, the corporate and business world has focused on the assumption that better leadership will provide better business results. This assumption is hardly ever examined or tested, but it is clear that it is a mandate from the highest executive offices of the corporate world. This assumption is also backed by the huge resources of our business sectors. According to Josh Bersin in a Forbes Magazine article (Feb. 4, 2014), “US spending on corporate training grew by 15% last year (the highest growth rate in seven years) to over \$70 billion in the US and over \$130 billion worldwide.

The results of this commitment have been dubbed by Harvard’s Barbara Kellerman (2012) as “the leadership industry” (pp.154-55), and it has fueled the examination of leadership from all angles and perspectives. It has also put a major focus on the training and development of people to become leaders.

The Christian Church has not been oblivious to this movement and has attached itself to the coat strings of secular business. Our United Methodist Church has matched this increase in resources toward leadership. Because it is such a high priority to this author personally, the California-Pacific Annual Conference has dedicating over a quarter of a million dollars toward leadership development of our clergy, laity and churches in the next four years.

Just as the secular corporate world is not questioning or examining whether leadership development is really working, the church lags far behind in a similar quest. The church is simply not scientifically examining the effectiveness of our leadership initiatives, and until it does, we will not know if it is making any real difference in mission and ministry.

Because there has not been a lot of research and writing on the topic of leadership and John Wesley's contribution, this paper seems timely. It is also a critical time in the life of the denomination of the United Methodist Church. Because of the LGBTQI divide within the United States, the United Methodist Church finds itself at a crossroads between the extreme positions of the traditionalists and the progressives. With the coming Special Called Session in 2019 to decide which direction the church will take on LGBTQI inclusion, there is speculation of a division or split in the church. No one knows which direction the church will go, and in any case, we will lose some members and churches in the process. I believe that it will be far less loss than the two ideological extremes are projecting, but nevertheless, we will have casualties in the change process.

Whatever happens in 2019 and beyond, the United Methodist Church will need real leadership to navigate the future of the denomination. John Wesley cannot help us in our current crisis, yet there are leadership concepts from Wesley that can help the church move forward into the future. Hopefully, this paper will highlight some of them.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

With the relatively recent explosion on secular leadership resources, there has not been extensive research done on the intersection of John Wesley and leadership. Overall, the Christian church has been a little slow in adapting its specific work on leadership as compared to the secular world. In some ways we have been talking about church leadership for decades, but there hasn't been a lot of hard research and major publications, especially in the area of John Wesley and leadership.

Lovett Weems' book: "Leadership in the Wesleyan Spirit" (1999) was one of the first to address a modern leadership paradigm from the Wesleyan perspective. Weems organizes his book around the "Principles, Practices, and Passions" of leadership in the Wesleyan spirit. He provides a basic and overall vision of leadership from the Wesleyan perspective. The book continues to hold up well in terms of our contemporary church scene.

Although written on a different theme than Wesley and leadership, D. Michael Henderson's book "John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples" (1997) nevertheless looks at leadership from the lens of Wesley's interlocking meetings structure. One can see a model of leadership emerging from Wesley's creation of the society, class meeting, band, and select society. As one moved up the ladder of successive meetings, a natural by product was leadership development. I will return to some of Henderson's research in the body of this paper.

This author's own book, "Spiritual Kaizen: How to Become a Better Church Leader" (2013) also does not focus exclusively on Wesley and Leadership but makes the case that Wesley's discipling model facilitates the development of leadership and faith on an incremental and iterative process.

The most recent book on Wesley and Leadership is Bishop Kenneth Carder and Lacey Warner's "Grace to Lead: Practicing Leadership in the Wesleyan Tradition" (2011). Drawing upon the deep theological and doctrine foundations of Wesley, the authors argue that church leadership must be steeped in the biblical and theological context of our vocation as clergy: representative of God's divine grace and repentance. Indicative of this positions is their quote:

Leaders, therefore, are resident theologians. Their identity, worldview, and vocation are anchored in, formed and empowered by, and directed toward God's salvation through grace. They live and move and have their being in theology—God's revelation, presence, and mission. As theologians they discern and interpret who God is, where God is, what God is doing, and what our relationship is to the nature and presence and mission of God. (pp. 44-45).

Carder and Warner go on to use Wesley's sermon: "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity" as a touchpoint to contemporary Christian leadership. They play on Wesley's concern that the lack of "doctrine, discipline and self-denial" will ultimately lead to the downfall of Methodism.

It is interesting to note that Randy Maddox in his paper entitled "Formation for Christian Leadership: Wesleyan Reflections," also uses the sermon "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity" as the basis of his reflections on leadership. Maddox's starting point, much the same as Carder and Warner is based on the "Vital role of doctrine in Christian life." (p. 115)

Of course, there have been numerous other articles, lectures and papers written (Randy Maddox, Russ Richey, Kevin Watson, etc.) that have the theme of leadership addressed by some principles of John Wesley, and again, I will refer to some of these ideas in the body of this paper.

## **JOHN WESLEY AND THE PROCESS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Although the generic concept of leadership has been around throughout history, the specific examination of individual leadership is a modern phenomenon. John Wesley is very much a product of his pre-Enlightenment worldview, and our modern concept of individual leadership development simply did not exist in Wesley's time. Therefore, we would not see Wesley commenting specifically on leadership per se in his voluminous writings. He intuitively understood leadership in the process of his structure that included the society, class meeting, band, and select society. Leadership development is presumed in each of these interlocking pieces of his organization.

A quick review of Wesley's structure:

### **PUBLIC SERVICES (THE SOCIETY):**

The large group gatherings to expose people to the grace of the Triune God focused on the cognitive aspect of teaching and instruction. These services helped introduce people to the

biblical and doctrine teaching of the faith and entice them to return to a small group discipling system. It is equivalent to our general worship services of the church of today.

### **THE TRIAL BAND:**

A small tightly focused group to introduce people to the Christian life and serve as a testing ground to see the sincerity of their faith. One did not have to be a full convert to the faith in order to join the trial band, but it was designed for those seeking a deeper spiritual commitment to Jesus Christ. A rough equivalent might be our current membership classes, especially those who believe in “high expectation” membership and are serious about setting a high bar for church/faith commitment.

### **THE CLASS MEETING:**

Moving on to a deeper commitment from the Trial Band, the Class Meeting provided the staple of the tremendous growth in British and American Methodism. The main objective was “a sincere desire for God” (Thomas R. Albin, “Inwardly Persuaded: Religion of Heart in Early British Methodism,” p. 44). As Albin describes the purpose of the class meeting:

What I shall call its “formational focus” was the minds of its members. That is, it offered them clear instruction in the central truths of the Christian faith. But this doctrinal instruction was supplemented by practical guidance in Christian living, that is, by the enforcement of the General Rules and by the leader’s deliverance of earnest exhortations and reproofs to the members. This I call the “praxeological context.” Finally, the “affective focus” of the class meeting was kindling of the members’ desire for God. Those awakening by the Spirit could find comfort and company within their class meeting. (p. 45).

Immediately, one can see the importance of the class leader in this context. Helping those who were brand new to the faith required basic leadership skills and a deeper understanding of the ways and means of Methodism. Not only would one have to know the basic fundamentals of the General Rules, but also the doctrinal standards of early Methodism. However, the deeper skill set involved applying the rules and doctrines to one’s daily life. Undoubtedly, the effectiveness of the class leader would rise and fall on their ability to make the faith come alive to novice believers. In some ways, leadership was key to the success of the class meeting.

Albin affirms this when he writes:

The key to the health and growth of the early movement was directly related to the quality and character of the local class leaders. Selected personally, by John or Charles Wesley, a leader was responsible for determining the times and places for the weekly meetings, choosing the hymns that were sung at the beginning and end of each meeting, leading the meetings, providing spiritual and scriptural advice for the members, and offering prayers appropriate to the members’ expressed needs. In the

class meetings, individual members had the opportunity to express their intellectual needs and concerns. The leader would then respond to the questions in the hearing of the group. Class members thus found answers to their own questions and also grew from hearing the discussions of other members' questions. (p. 44)

It is interesting to note that only in the class meetings were the prayers led exclusively by the class leader. In the next two small groups of the band and select society, prayers could be offered by anyone in the group. This is an important point of modeling leadership. At this early level participants could see the direct influence of the leader him/herself. Such leadership modeling could become a springboard by which participants aspired to become leaders themselves. It is an intuitively brilliant way to promote leadership development.

In regard to the revitalization and renewal of our current United Methodist Church, the fact that the class meeting was lay led leads me to the exact same conclusion of Kevin Watson (2014): that any such renewal will come with the reintroduction of the class meeting into our modern church paradigm.

I firmly believe that any rejuvenation of our United Methodist Church will be lay led, and until we break the overt clericalism of our church and set our lay leaders free to resource and lead our church we will not grow. Currently, we are wasting the gifts, talents, time and energy of our laity by not facilitating their leadership in the small group and class structure of our churches. I am constantly experiencing laity who want to learn and do more in the local church, and our pastors are refusing that privilege.

I am also profoundly struck by the basic purpose of the early class meeting in the opportunity for participants to express their individual needs and concerns. The class leader was to facilitate the answers and elicit deeper responses from the whole body. I firmly believe that this is what the secular world is hungering for, and especially our younger people. There is a deep spiritual hunger for meaning and purpose, and secular people have already made the leap that they will not find answers in the organized church.

My friend, the late Phyllis Tickle used to talk about this all the time. Her premise is that at one point in the early 1960's we had the people, but we did not engage their deepest spiritual longings, so they left the church in search of meaning and turned to what she called "The Age of Aquarius:" new age religions, secular humanism, and other world religions." But "The Age of Aquarius" let them down also, and they failed to find their deepest hungers fulfilled. Now, we have all these people still searching for real meaning and not seeking our churches because we have already let them down once (P. Tickle, Personal Communications, 2013)

I am absolutely convinced that if we can seriously engage spiritual meaning and questions at the deepest level, and allow our laity to resource this quest, we will attract thousands of people who are looking for spiritual substance. The class meeting could very well be the tool to facilitate this strategy.

Because the class meeting functioned on behavior level, the emphasis was on practice and how to live into convincing grace. The over-arching norms of the meeting were the General Rules of Wesley: 1) Do no harm: things not to do, or prohibitions; 2) Do good: things to do, or exhortation for benevolence; and 3) Keep the Ordinances: practice the means of grace. Thus, the focus is clearly on the practice of living, and in our age of complexity, many secular people are looking for basic practices, not long doctrinal teachings.

As the Rules for the United Societies (1744) outline:

There is only one condition precisely required in those who desire admission into these societies—"a desire to flee the wrath to come, to be saved from their sin:" but, wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation. (J. Wesley, p. 282).

Wesley's emphasis on behavior or practice mirrors a contemporary shift that is taking place in the training and development of leadership. With the Greek emphasis on knowledge as concepts, our modern educational paradigm has a natural bias on pedagogy as the collection of ideas of the mind. It is the seeing of human beings as living containers and education as the dumping of ideas or concepts into the brain as a container. It is the downloading of more and more information into the mind, rather than increasing the size of the container by enlarging the practical capacity of experiential learning.

Thus, our California-Pacific Annual Conference is moving away from the downloading model of some ministry expert imparting their successful model of ministry at a teaching event. These one-off teaching models simply do not work, as we have some data collected that there is absolutely no change in behavior from this paradigm.

In an infamous doctoral dissertation in Organizational Leadership at Pepperdine University, Marco Cavazzoni (2002) engaged in a social scientific study of the effectiveness of a major corporate executive leadership program of a major aerospace company. As an executive at Boeing Aerospace he evaluated the results of their executive training program at their state of the art Executive Leadership Center in St. Louis. Through highly quantitative data analysis his research concluded that those going through the best leadership training that the company developed had no lasting impact on the leadership behavior of the trainees after one year. His results were so embarrassing to Boeing, they refused to allow their name to be mentioned in his dissertation, and so he had to refer to the company as "a leading aerospace corporation."

He also suggests that a quantitative evaluative analysis is absolutely essential in determining the effectiveness of such leadership enhancing programs, and in the case of his company, a multimillion dollar executive education program was simply not working.

Our United Methodist Church is notorious for the lack of obtaining this hard data about the training and development that we conduct. We are attempting to do this

important work of quantitative analysis and coming to the same conclusions on our clergy leadership training and development events and programs.

One of the important concepts I have learned comes from the Positive Deviance School of leadership. One of the central researchers in this area is Richard Pascale, and his book written with co-authors, Jerry Sternin and Monique Sternin is “The Power of Positive Deviance: How unlikely innovators solve the World’s Toughest Problems (2010).” In their book, they have developed a process to isolate and capture those positive deviants, or outliers who ultimately find a way to succeed in tackling the most difficult of problems or challenges. One of their pivotal insights is this: **“It’s easier to act your way into a new way of thinking, than to think your way into a new way of acting.”** (p. 38). In other words, practice is more important than knowledge, and learning about something does not necessarily change behavior.

This calls into question all the traditional ways the church has been teaching leadership: large scale clergy and laity gatherings where experts or specialists come in and download their understanding of success (sort of like what we are doing in this conference!). We are even questioning whether annual conference session is the most effective vehicle for moving and engaging the church. So often the wrong people are there as members, and the format does not produce the outcome of transformation and behavioral change that we are needing.

What we are experimenting with now is smaller venues, where practitioners come together to have a direct experience, and the learning takes place through active participation. We are also finding out to affect true behavioral change the practice of habit formation seems critical. In other words, if we really want to change the behavior of our clergy and laity, the daily ritual or habits of the person elicits the greatest possibilities for change. For example, I believe our daily spiritual practices are critical for us to develop the spiritual foundation for discipleship and leadership. If every United Methodist engaged in intentional daily spiritual practices, we would witness a profound renewal in the life of our church.

In the class meeting, Wesley predated this concept by centuries, and once again, a return to the class meeting where we focus on key behaviors might hold the key to our renewal.

### **THE BAND:**

One of Wesley’s favorite experiments, the bands were small homogenous groups (men separated from the women, and even groups of youth who met separately) that focused on the affective and emotional side of the faith. They were designed to go much deeper spiritually than the class meetings and were reserved for those in the state of justification or justifying grace. The bands were for the spiritual mature, and they formed the next advanced level in Christian discipleship.

Wesley was probably so enamored with them due to the deep soul searching and intense honesty that formed the central purpose of the bands. He himself longed for such depth and

honesty of the soul, and he and Charles led the bands on those occasions when they were available.

Albin points out the leadership of the band:

The leadership of the band was shared with a greater degree of mutuality than might first appear from the Rules and the extant membership books. While it is clear that each band had a designated leader for the sake of representation at the band meetings, it is also clear that the leadership within the small group was shared and that various members took turns serving as the leader over the years. (Albin, p. 47)

There are two significant leadership issues that emerge from Wesley's creating of the bands. One, comes from the practice of sharing leadership or revolving the leadership of the bands each meeting. This is often called in the contemporary leadership literature: "Distributive Leadership," whereby leadership levels are enhanced with everyone taking turns in the very practice of leadership.

Once again, we must point to the modern church practice of clericalism reducing the practice of Distributive Leadership, by putting the pastor in charge of everything and reducing the laity's role to that of passive spectator.

It seems Wesley had it right in a system where all the participants took turns in a revolving leadership of the bands. The by-product of such a leadership strategy is that these advanced leaders would grow in their experience of being a leader, and especially how to lead at this advanced level.

The second contemporary leadership development insight is the fact that Wesley envisioned deepening layers of leadership as a step-by-step movement. One can see from the movement from public service to trail band to class meeting and then to the advanced band an adult education model that builds on a deeper learning system. It is the same psychology that motivates high achievers to work toward more advanced degrees or higher levels of accomplishment.

The martial arts are a perfect example of the belt ranking system motivating practitioners to continue learning from white belt to multi-colored belts to brown belt and then black belt with degrees of mastery. Having taught martial arts my entire life, many of the students continued to be motivated by achieving the next higher belt ranking, and the psychology is a tried and true example of human achievement dynamics.

How many local churches lack this succession of adult education classes and thus miss the whole psychology of human achievement? Discipling classes could follow Wesley's process in its entirety by moving members through prevenient, convincing, justifying, sanctifying and perfecting grace, setting up small groups and formative classes in a succession of deeper spirituality.



## **THE PENITENT BAND:**

Wesley was truly before his time in the creation of the penitent bands as a forerunner of our modern self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Because Wesley's starting point was the utter depravity of the human condition, he realized that our sinful nature would not make it easy to stay on the path of grace. There would be constant backsliding and failure of the spirit. However, Wesley also possessed the optimism that God would never abandon us and prevenient grace would continually attempt to restore us back from our fallen nature.

The Penitent Bands were created exactly for this purpose: the rehabilitation of those who lacked the will to stay on the journey of grace, and the restoration of their souls so they may start anew.

As Wesley described it:

And yet while most of these who were thus intimately joined together, went on daily from faith to faith; some fell from the faith, either all at once, by failing into known, willful sin; or gradually, and almost insensibly, by giving way in what they called little things; by sins of omission, by yielding to heart-sins, or by not watching unto prayer. The exhortations and prayers used among the believers did no longer profit these. They wanted advice and instructions suited to their case; which as soon as I observed, I separated them from the rest, and desired them to meet me apart on Saturday evenings. (p. 259-260)

From the literature both Charles and John were greatly encouraged by the results of the penitent bands. Many overcame their lapses and were restored back to their original spiritual health. Some even overcame their adversity to make even greater strides than those who did not lapse.

We don't know much about the actual content of the penitent bands, but for sure there was singing, prayer and general instructions by the Wesleys. There was also small group work that furthered the instructions and intentions for healing. However, one notices the practical behavioral psychology of holding the meetings on Saturday night, whereby the greatest temptations to fall away from the faith would happen on a Saturday evening. Once again, it is an example of the Wesleys' intuitive genius when it came to human behavior.

The intersection of contemporary leadership and the penitent bands is too numerous and complex to take on in the scope of this paper. However, in summary form, the recent examination of the place of resilience in leadership would be the starting point. Resilience has emerged as a key leadership quality, and a number of writers and researchers have documented its source (Southwick, S. & Charney, D., Sandberg, S. & Grant, A., etc.).

The correlation between resilience and leadership stems from the ability to bounce back from failure and defeat, and the reality that most great leaders have faced some major life challenges or failures at many points of their lives. Malcolm Gladwell has documented this in his book: “David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits and the Art of Battling Giants” (2013).

At one point in the book he chronicles how dyslexic children have a terrible disadvantage early in life, and their reading challenges often leads to early failure and frustration. However, he cites the cases of those who have been spurred on by these challenges and turned this disadvantage into adult success. As he writes:

What do we mean when we call something a disadvantage? Conventional wisdom holds that a disadvantage is something that ought to be avoided—that it is a setback or a difficulty that leaves you worse off than you would be otherwise. But that is not always the case...I want to explore the idea that there are such things as “desirable difficulties.” That concept was conceived by Robert Bjork and Elizabeth Bjork, two psychologists at the University of California, Los Angeles, and it is a beautiful and haunting way of understanding how underdogs come to excel. (p. 102)

Yet, he chronicles the lives of ultra-successful people who have struggled with dyslexia and reached the pinnacles of their profession or work. Somehow the setbacks and challenges that they endure because of their disabilities has worked for their advantage. As Gladwell comments:

I asked every dyslexic I interviewed the question posed at the beginning of the previous chapter: Would they wish dyslexia on their own children. Every one of them said no...But the question of what any of us would wish on our children is the wrong question, isn't it? The right question is whether we as a society need people who have emerged from some kind of trauma – and the answer is that we plainly do...There are times and places, however, when we all depend on people who have been hardened by their experiences. (pp. 161-162)

John Wesley is a good example of someone who went through serious setbacks and failures: from his early doubts about his own faith, to failed romances and outright rejection by Sophy Hopkey, to an abysmal failure on his American missionary journey. Wesley seemed to get stronger from these failures and did not let them deter him from his central purpose and mission for God. In fact, the lessons learned from his failures seemed to strengthen his faith resolve and probably led to his constant turning to spiritual practices and disciplines.

As I have studied high effective clergy, they have demonstrated this same resilience. One, they are not afraid to fail and when they do fail they attempt to learn as much as they can from the failure. The other key element to their resilience is a deep well of faith that they ground themselves in to pick up the pieces and carry on. Wesley models this same paradigm in his

thoughts and practices. We ground ourselves in Christian doctrine that fuels our deep well of faith. We regularly practice the disciplines that enable us to cope with the vicissitudes of life, and we attempt to give up our own will in self-denial so that the love of God and neighbor will have a higher priority than our own self-interest.

As we modern United Methodist leaders find ourselves in the midst of denominational uncertainty, rising tensions between ideological extremes, and a pervasive pessimism over our future, this is exactly the time for us to find the resilience to cope. If we can draw upon the deep resources of doctrine, discipline and self-denial, we will possess the resilience we need in this time of liminality and disruption. The lessons we can learn from Wesley on resilience just might hold the key to our leadership for such a time as this.

### **THE SELECT SOCIETY:**

The least known of all of Wesley's groups, the Select Society was a set apart collection of those who were serious about sanctification and the seeking of Christian perfection. It was clearly a collection of both men and women who had worked their way through the class and band meetings and were ready for the highest level of spiritual engagement that the movement could support. It was also a place that John Wesley himself could share his deepest spiritual condition in a safe environment. This is probably one of the reasons that confidentiality was one of the few defined rules of the select society, the other two being that members would submit to their pastor in all indifferent things and would bring all one can spare toward the common good once a week (Albin, p. 48).

As Wesley describes the select society:

I saw it might be useful to give some advices to all those who continued in the light of God's countenance, which the rest of their brethren did not want, and probably could not receive. So, I desired a small number of such as appeared to be in this state, to spend an hour with me every Monday morning. My design was, not only to direct them how to press after perfection; to exercise their every grace, and improve every talent they had received; and to incite them to love one another more, and to watch more carefully over each other; but also to have a select company, to whom I might unbosom myself on all occasions, without reserve; and whom I could propose to all their brethren as a pattern of love, of holiness, and of good works. (Works, VIII, p. 261-262)

It is clear from the surviving membership lists that those who were members of the select societies were also class and band leaders, and although Wesley did not speak of the group as a collection of leaders it was clearly the case. Albin lists the expected response of the Select Society as "love, service, and spiritual leadership." (Ibid, p. 46).

Henderson (1997) sees the Select Society as fulfilling the training mode for the Wesleyan movement:

As its name suggests, it was a “select” company of men and women whom Wesley had hand-picked from among the most faithful Methodists. The purpose of this group was to model or exemplify what Methodism was all about, especially the perfecting of the human spirit, and it was to provide a training experience in the doctrines and methods of Methodism. The select society was an elite corps of those enthusiasts who had worked their way up through the ranks of class meeting, society, and band and were considered by both their peers and the leaders as the standard-bearers of the movement. (p. 121)

Henderson might be overstating this a bit from the meager first-hand reports about the select societies, but in composition it does seem the key leaders of the movement were involved.

Even though we do not know a lot of details about the select societies, the application of their overarching principles holds a great deal of relevancy to modern leadership practices. For example, in the creation of new faith communities and ministries, there is an increased emphasis that a core team of 10-12 key leaders be established to guide the new church start. Without this core group of committed leaders, new starts tend to drift, and key metrics are not met.

This same principle is gaining more popularity in the task of revitalization of existing churches also. It goes by various names: “Right 12, 12 Strong,” etc., but the principles are the same: gathering 10-12 key leaders and influencers to direct the revitalization.

This has been a common theme by church leadership consultants for decades. John Maxwell would often recommend in his church consulting workshops that every church create one key leadership group that meets regularly to strategize, vision, align and direct the church forward. He recommended all of the key leaders and influencers of the church to gather for this purpose, and if a leader could not commit to attendance, that person could not serve as a leader for that season of time.

Secular leadership writer, John Kotter (1996) frames the same principle in his change management paradigm. You must create a “Guiding Coalition” of key leaders of your organization in order to manage the change dynamics. (p. 53)

In many ways, this same principle is operative at all levels of our church. For example, at the Bishop and Appointed Cabinet table, we are responsible for “the spiritual and temporal leadership of the annual conference.” Most appointed cabinets across the connection practically function as the select societies for the annual conferences. Because the Bishop and District Superintendents no longer have a regular home church to worship and be spiritually grounded in, the Appointed Cabinet takes the place of the spiritual home for these individuals. It is a safe environment in which the Bishop and Cabinet members can share their deepest spiritual trials, hurts, and concerns. Outsiders would be surprised at the deep level of spirituality that takes place in the cabinet, and hopefully it is at the level of sanctification or working toward a deeper perfection of our love of God and neighbor.

Whether Wesley intended the select society to be the key leadership body of the movement is an open question, but part of his brilliance was the intuitive way he created the interlocking groups, and perhaps the unintended consequences resulted in a dynamic leadership model. If we are thinking in large leadership systems, each component part or piece must serve a distinct purpose. As we look at Wesley's system of groups there is an inherent leadership paradigm that emerges. From the large public worships, people are exposed to the Wesleyan way. If they show interest, they are immediately put into class meetings where their behaviors are examined and emphasized and personal relationships on a small scale are developed. From there individuals are able to move to deeper levels of faith and growth in the band meetings where small homogenous groups develop deep ties in working on the emotional levels of their faith. As people demonstrate their commitment and leadership at these levels, it culminates in the select society, where mature followers commit to the highest aspirations of the faith and hone their leadership by creating a comprehensive strategy and direction for the movement itself. At any point if one backslides or fails at an early level, the penitent band is there to pick them up and restore them back to health in faith. It is a very comprehensive leadership development system, and it can be replicated and scaled at all levels of our current United Methodist Church.

The real tragedy is our failure in not returning to this model of interlocking groups at all levels of our current United Methodist Church's structure and organization. If we are serious about true leadership development, and by all accounts the very revitalization of the United Methodist Church as a denomination, we will have to return to our Wesleyan roots, and recast Wesley's practical application of the interlocking groups. We will have to alter some of the original concepts, and of course update the language of instructions to our modern times. Yet, it will not take much to recast the original groups to a modern relevancy. It is my hope that we find the commitment to take action on this key task for the future of our church!

## **A KEY LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTIC OF JOHN WESLEY**

The bulk of this paper has focused on John Wesley's organizational prowess, and it might be helpful to mention one key leadership characteristic of Wesley himself. Wesley accomplished so much in his lifetime and I think this can be attributed to his sense of personal discipline and focus. From the time he was young, his mother Suzanna exposed all the children to a set formula of religious disciplines. Along with his formal education, John was tutored in spiritual disciplines that would later form his "means of grace."

In his sermon "The Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," the lack of disciple was one of the key reasons Wesley believed contributed to the fact that Christianity had done so little good for the world because it has produced so few real Christians. By "discipline" Wesley meant sustained Christian spiritual and compassionate practices, and not the generic characteristic we call "discipline." Yet, in the Wesleyan practice of the means of grace, there is a level of our contemporary understanding of the word discipline. In other words, one has to have the discipline of the will to commit to regular spiritual disciplines. In our harried and overscheduled modern lives, disciple means that we order and structure our time and energy to focus on specific things we need done. Discipline means an orderly and structured methodology.

It is the comfort level to want a structured schedule and the setting aside of actions that one will do during a set time. In order to practice spiritual disciplines like prayer, scripture reading, fasting, etc. one has to have the personal discipline to prioritize these and actually carry them out.

Wesley possessed both of these definitions of the term. He prioritized the means of grace per his understanding of disciplines, and he also structured and organized his time in our modern definition of the word.

I have always been struck by John Wesley's almost obsessive-compulsive nature, and he displays all the internal hard-wiring of an extreme "judgmental" type on the Myers-Briggs. This is best displayed in his historic questions to those being ordained:

(19) Will you observe the following directions?

- (a) Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed. Never trifle away time; neither spend any more time at any one place than is strictly necessary.
- (b) Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time. And do not mend our rules, but keep them, not for Wrath, but for conscience sake. (Book of Discipline, p. 258).

When I go over these historic questions with those to be ordained before the annual conference, we usually joke about the obsessive nature of Wesley, but what I usually point out is that he actually lived this way and believed that his preachers should also.

Another example is Wesley's use of spiritual questions throughout his whole adult life, and the posing of questions in the class and band meetings. Early on while studying at Oxford, he and his fellow students often used questions such as these to gauge their works of piety:

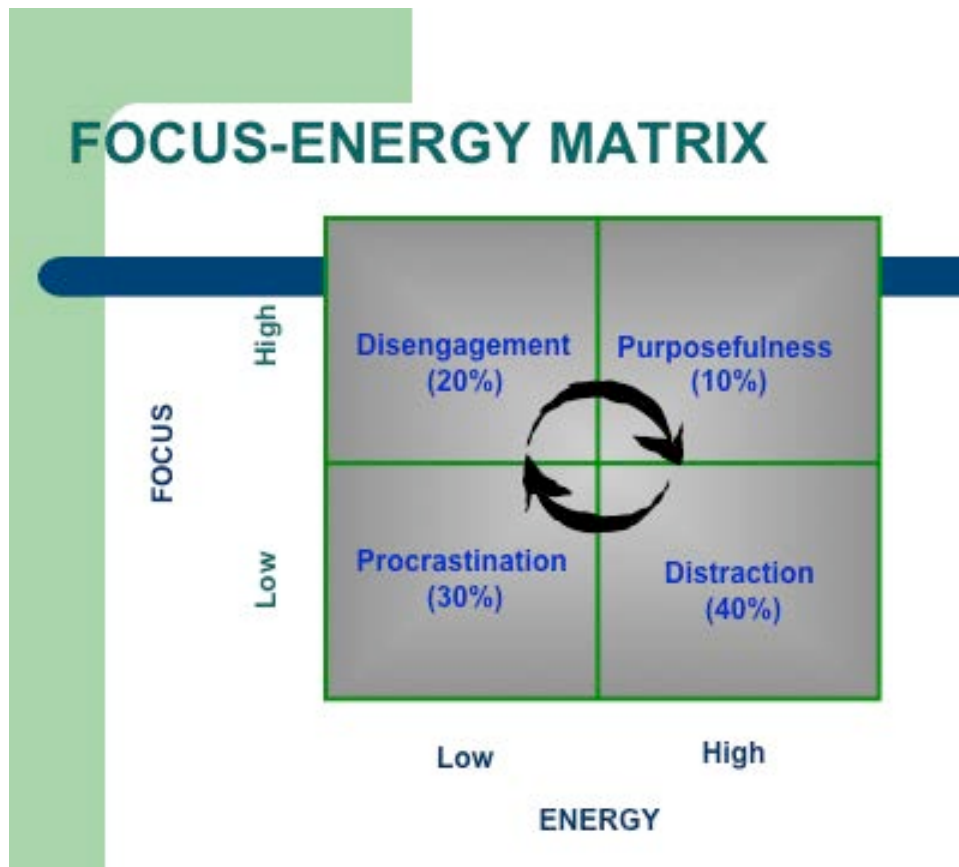
- \* Have I prayed with fervor, by myself and at Chapel?
  - \* Have I used the Collects at 9, 12, and 3? Grace?
  - \* Have I after every pleasure immediately given thanks?
  - \* Did I in the morning plan the business of the day?
  - \* Have I been zealous in undertaking and active in doing what good I could?
  - \* Has goodwill been and appeared the spring of all my actions toward others?
- (Carder and Warner, p. 88)

One notices immediately question 4 on this list: "Did I in the morning plan the business of the day?" This is a standard suggestion in modern time management: having a daily plan and to do list in order to prioritize that which is most important to attend to.

The fact that Wesley daily displayed our modern understanding of discipline and focus is the primary reason that he accomplished so much in his life. This conclusion is backed by a whole host of modern secular research, and I will cite one compelling study as an example.

## THE ENERGY-FOCUS MATRIX

In an excellent article entitled “Beware the Busy Manager” by Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghoshal in the Harvard Business Review (2002), they propose a “Focus-Energy matrix” that is enlightening. They see two characteristics in managers and leaders that will determine their work style and ultimate success: **focus & energy**. They define focus “as concentrated attention—the ability to zero in on a goal and see the task through to completion.” Energy is defined “as the vigor that is fueled by intense personal commitment. Energy is what pushes a manager to go the extra mile when tackling heavy workloads and meeting tight deadlines.” (p. 64). Their matrix includes four quadrants of low focus and energy, high focus and low energy, high energy and low focus, and high focus and energy. The following diagram will illustrate:



Low focus and low energy produces “procrastinators,” and their research shows roughly 10% of managers fall into this quadrant. High focus and low energy produces the “disengaged,” and 20% of managers fall into this quadrant. The largest group of managers: 40% fall into the high energy, low focus group and they are called the “distracted.” These are folks who feel compelled to do something, and the frenetic energy to be all over the map, but do not have a specific objective that they can concentrate on. Often, they cause more problems than solutions.

The final group possesses both high energy and high focus, and so they deserve the name “purposeful.” Only 10% of managers in their research are able to combine these two elements, and naturally, they get the most done and are the most effective leaders.

A major characteristic of the “purposeful” is how they approach their work. In this sense, they work from the inside out: They figure out what they need to do and then work to manage the outside external environment. These managers’ focus lies in setting their internal agenda, and then managing their external environment where they put their energy into practice.

Undoubtedly, Wesley would place high in the “Purposeful” column. He had both energy and focus (discipline) and this led to him being able to accomplish so many tangible outcomes in his life. This carried on throughout his life even unto old age. As Stephen Tomkins (2003) points out in his biography of Wesley:

Wesley still continued the Journal’s reports on his own health and even in his eighties, they did not become more negative, merely more frequent. On his 82<sup>nd</sup> birthday, he declared, “It is now eleven years since I have felt any such thing as weariness...I dare not impute this to natural causes. It is the will of God.” His only illnesses were those inflicted by his own actions. That winter he had caught a fever trudging all day through London streets ankle deep in melting snow begging 200 pounds so that he could add clothes to his annual provisions of food and fuel for the poor (p. 191)

If any of us will be able to declare when we are 82 years old, that it has been 11 years since we have even felt any weariness, then truly we will be leading a life in God who will make that possible!

## **CONCLUSION:**

It has been a joy to move between the two worlds, one of John Wesley and the other of our modern times as we have looked at this issue of leadership. I am sure we have made some mistakes in the leaping across the centuries, but those are the product of this author and I own them fully.

Hopefully, it has been a helpful exercise to those who have read this article. Our own leadership is being solely tested in our current times as a denomination. As we look to a way forward from our LGBTQ impasse and the possibilities of another historical split in Methodism, we must find hope and guidance from Wesley himself through his writings and historical records. I hope to have made a small contribution as we look at leadership from a Wesleyan perspective, and I hope that we remain grounded in many of his tenants as we navigate the uncertain tempest of our current times.



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