



THE HEART OF A METHODIST

STUDY GUIDE

Mark #3: Gives Thanks

Book: *Five Marks of a Methodist* by Steve Harper

SCRIPTURE

15 Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

2 Corinthians 9:15 (NRSV)

18 Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:38-39

11 Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. 12 I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:11-13

STUDY & REFLECT/DISCUSS:

The Five Marks of a Methodist, Mark #3: Gives Thanks

"Wesley's third mark is that...Methodists give thanks. While we might think of these marks as 'simple,' we don't mean that they are easy. In fact, some expressions of the marks are impossible to do on our own. None of the marks are achievable apart from grace." –Steve Harper

1. Paul tells us to give thanks in "every situation" (1 Thess 5:18). Harper writes, "How are we to give thanks *in every situation* when some situations seem to come not from the will of God but from the pit of hell?" **Describe a time when it has been easy to give thanks. Now consider a time when it has been difficult or impossible to give thanks.**

2. Harper reminds us that we know from Wesley's writings that he "was not a pie-in-the-sky or Pollyanna-ish person...He was not a naïve Christian, and he was not the least bit interested in launching a sentimental movement." Wesley was very much aware of the difficulties of life, yet still practiced giving thanks to God. Wesley was able to do this because his thanksgiving was grounded in the nature of God and not the circumstances of life. **Brainstorm as a group (if applicable), using scripture, tradition, reason, and experience what you believe to be God's nature.**

3. Wesley “would disavow the insurance company claim that hurricanes, floods, and other disasters are ‘acts of God.’ Instead, he would see every form of evil as a violation of God’s will. Neither germs nor grenades reveal the world God intends.” **Where is God in the midst of violations of God’s will? When we are in the most difficult places of life, where is God?**

4. Understanding that God is love as opposed to hate or anger is the foundation for our thanksgiving. Wesley’s last words before dying were, “The best of all is, God is with us!” **How would your life look different because you know that God is with you? How does it make you feel to know that God is not taking delight in bad things that happen to you or to anyone else?**

5. Harper says, “We know people who lead off conversations with negative attitudes or feelings. We know people who approach life more as problem to be confronted rather than a glory to be lived.” **What can we do, what disciplines can we engage in, to remain or become people who approach life as a glory to be lived?**

LIVING IT OUT

“Thanks” is always our first response when we recognize that God has helped us.

–Anne Lamott (*Help, Thanks, and Wow*)

Wesley practiced giving thanks diligently for more than 60 years, as recorded in his personal journals. Every Saturday he looked back over his week and gave thanks. Here is the format that Wesley followed.

1. He expressed gratitude each week in the following words:

*God, you the great creator and sovereign Lord of heaven and earth,
you the father of angels and human beings,
you the giver of life and protector of all your creatures,
mercifully accept this my morning sacrifice to praise and
thanksgiving, which I desire to offer, with all humility,
to your divine majesty.*

2. He recounted general blessings.

3. He recounted specific acts of God’s goodness and faithfulness to him. Where was God at work in my life this week?

Pick a day of the week to follow Wesley’s “thanksgiving formula.” Commit to trying this for one month. **At the end of the month ask yourself, has God grown a greater spirit of thankfulness in me? Am I approaching life as a glory to be live?**

PRAYER

Ask the Holy Spirit to grow your thankfulness for God’s work in your life and in the world. Ask God to increase your thankfulness in the every day of life. Pray for each other, and pray for other needs you may be aware of. Pray for the “empty chair,” for those who are not yet with our group/our church. Thank God for the transforming work that God has done and is yet to do in our lives, families, the community, and the world.