

Transformational Small Groups in the Style of the Wesleyan Class Meeting



Opening Prayer

Loving God,
open our eyes to see what is beautiful,
our minds to know what is true,
and our hearts to love what is good;
for Jesus' sake. **Amen.**
*(From Chalice Worship, ed. C. Cartwright
and O.I. Cricket Harrison, 1997)*

A Methodist is... "One who has 'the love of God shed abroad in [their] heart by the Holy Ghost given unto [them];' one who loves the Lord [their] God with all [their] heart, and with all [their] soul, and with all [their] mind, and with all [their] strength. God is the joy of [their] heart, and the desire of [their] soul; which is constantly crying out, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!'"
John Wesley, "The Character of a Methodist"

THE MODERN CLASS MEETING

Wesley's class meeting can serve as a model for a contemporary transformational small group.

- 7-12 members, co-ed or single gender
- Led by a lay member
- 60-90 minutes per week



Introduction

The Christian life is not about knowing the right things. The Christian life is about living in Christ. Pastors hear all the time, "I'm not equipped to lead this small group. I don't know enough about the Bible, Jesus, and the history of the Church." The good news is that God doesn't ask us to be biblical scholars when God bids us follow. Simon, Andrew, James and John did not attend a three-year seminary before being gifted with the ability to pray, exhort, heal and feed others. The even better news is that Methodists, as originally envisioned by John Wesley, were not supposed to be scholars either. Wesley understood Christian discipleship more like an apprenticeship to Jesus than a scholarly endeavor where one masters a body of knowledge. So, Wesley developed a process by which Methodists cultivate this kind of discipleship. A process that allowed people who desired this kind of character to be challenged and held accountable for the sake of fleeing the wrath to come.

Wesley's System of Transformational Discipleship

The basic organizational structure during Wesley's time:

- ▶ **Societies.** The place where primary preaching and teaching takes place for the largest gathering of believers. Tends to meet weekly or even bi-weekly (e.g., Sunday and Wednesday evening) and has the lowest bar for accountability.
- ▶ **Classes.** Basic organizational unit, required participation, 12 people meeting weekly, focused on accountability, often geographically determined
- ▶ **Bands.** Optional participation, function was different than classes. It was deeply confessional and confidential. The bands were same-gender cells of 3-4 people gathered for pastoral care.

We might see these same organizing units today as:

- ▶ **Church.** The primary place where community preaching and teaching takes place.
- ▶ **Transformational Small Groups.** 7-12 people, focused on care of one another and accountability
- ▶ **Confessional Covenant Groups.** 3-4 people, focused on confession and covenant

SAMPLE TRANSFORMATIONAL GROUP AGENDA

- ▶ Open with prayer or singing. Offer an extemporaneous prayer or consider the following option:
Almighty God,
to you all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from you no secrets are hid:
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy Name;
through Christ our Lord. **Amen.** (Collect for Purity)
- ▶ Determine your questions ahead of time from the pool below. Allow for each person to respond. Each person should spend 1-2 minutes reflecting on the question before moving to the next person. After all have responded, move to the next question. Note: 3-4 questions for a 90-minute session or 2-3 questions for a 60-minute session.
 1. Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
 2. Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate?
 3. Do I confidentially pass on to another what was told to me in confidence?
 4. Can I be trusted?
 5. Am I a slave to dress, friends, work or habits?
 6. Am I self-conscious, self-pitying or self-justifying?
 7. Did the Bible live in me today?
 8. Do I give it time to speak to me every day?
 9. Am I enjoying prayer?
 10. When did I last speak to someone else about my faith?
 11. Do I pray about the money I spend?
 12. Do I go to bed on time and get up on time?
 13. Do I disobey God in anything?
 14. Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?
 15. Am I defeated in any part of my life?
 16. Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy or distrustful?
 17. How do I spend my spare time?
 18. Am I proud?
 19. Do I thank God that I am not like other people?
 20. Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold a resentment toward or disregard?
 21. Do I grumble or complain constantly?
 22. Is Christ real to me?
- ▶ Conclude with prayer.

RESOURCES:

Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know* (Zondervan, 2003).

Steve Manskar, *Disciples Making Disciples: A Guide for Covenant Discipleship Groups & Class Leaders* (Discipleship Resources, 2016).

David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance* (Wipf & Stock Pub, 2002).

Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* (Seedbed, 2014).

