

Learning to love and praise

**A compilation by the Revd Kenneth Howcroft
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What do you do when the modern world throws opportunities, challenges and questions at you, and you are trying to make sense of who you are and your purpose in life?

When we Methodists trace our spiritual ancestry, we discover that in each generation we turn to a Bible on the one hand and some sort of hymn book on the other.

We gather round the Word of God, listening for echoes of what God was saying to people in the times in which the Bible was written, seeking to hear through it what God is saying to us now. We share our insights into the good news ('gospel') of Jesus Christ, looking to discover the Holy Spirit's insight amongst us.

As we reflect on the Bible and the world in which we find ourselves, we find ourselves prompted by the Spirit to pray; and as we pray, we sing. We sing both when we gather together, and also when we are alone (even if only in our hearts and minds).

At our best, in each generation we Methodists have tried to become so steeped in the Bible that we do not just quote selected texts from it, but are also able to speak biblically to the contemporary world. To do that, we have also had to try to become so steeped in the languages of contemporary cultures that people can understand us.

We read, speak and sing the faith of Jesus Christ. Our hymns often present the stories and truths found in the Bible. Each verse can be full of biblical quotations, references and images. But they are also full of knowledge of what makes human beings tick, and how they respond when they are touched by the love of God. So when we sing, we are singing the faith, and making it our faith. Drawing from what has been done in the past, we have to re-express it all in the present age.

So we sing what we read, and we pray what we sing. Our ears are pricked to hear the still, small voice of God's love and grace; and our mouths open to speak and sing gratefully in return.

In the following pages you will find some passages from the Bible, and some brief comments on them. You will also find some verses from hymns, and some sayings about prayer which interact with them and, possibly, with our own experience. We hope that they will prompt you to look up the passages in the Bible and the hymn books from which they are taken. We hope that they will prompt you to pray. We pray that they will inspire you to tell us of examples of other hymns and songs that speak to you biblically about life in the modern world – or to write your own!

◆◆◆ Rejoicing

This is what the Lord says,
the one who created you... ,
the one who formed you... :
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name,
you are mine....
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One ... , your Saviour.

From Isaiah 43: 1,3

Isaiah speaks in God's name to the people of God known as Israel (and Judah).

But he does not speak to them exclusively, because Israel is to be a light to all the nations, so that God's salvation may reach to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6). Matthew's Gospel shows Jesus as a 'new' Israel, re-expressing and fulfilling the experience of Israel. Paul sees that the followers of Jesus share in that, whether they are Jewish or not, slave or free, male or female (Galatians 3:28). So the promises God makes are also for us.

O for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!

Jesus – the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life, and health, and peace.

He speaks; and listening to his voice,
new life the dead receive;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice;
the humble poor believe.

Charles Wesley, StF 364 verses 1,3,5

◆◆◆ Wondering

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
O Lord, you know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.
Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
.... For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works ...

Psalms 139: 1-7, 13

These days we can look at a scan of a baby in its mother's womb at three months, and can only wonder. If only we could see a scan of God's love surrounding us and God's Spirit animating us, we would become even more lost in wonder, love and praise.

Father of everlasting grace,
your goodness and your truth we praise,
your goodness and your truth we prove;
you have, in honour of your Son,
the gift unspeakable sent down,
the Spirit of life, and power, and love.

So shall we pray, and never cease,
so shall we thankfully confess
your wisdom, truth, and power, and love,
with joy unspeakable adore,
and bless and praise you evermore,
and serve you as your hosts above.

Charles Wesley, StF 378 verses 1 and 3

Open, Lord, my inward ear, and
bid my heart rejoice;
bid my quiet spirit hear
your comfortable voice;
never in the whirlwind found,
or where earthquakes rock the place,
still and silent is the sound,
the whisper of your grace.

From the world of sin, and noise,
and hurry I withdraw;
for the small and inward voice
I wait with humble awe;
silent am I now and still,
dare not in your presence move;
to my waiting soul reveal
the secret of your love.

Lord, my time is in your hand,
my soul to you convert;
you can make me understand,
though I am slow of heart;
yours in whom I live and move,
yours the work, your name divine;
you are wisdom, power, and love,
and all you are is mine.

*Charles Wesley, StF 450 verses 1, 2,5 (verses 1 and 2
draw on details of the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19)*

God's command to "pray without
ceasing" is founded on the necessity
we have of his grace to preserve the life of
God in the soul, which can no more subsist
one moment without it, than the body can
without air.

John Wesley

... Struggling

On those days Jesus came from Nazareth
of Galilee and was baptized by John in
the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out
of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart
and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.
And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my
Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into
the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for
forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was
with the wild beasts; and the angels waited
on him.

Mark 1:9-13

Jesus shows what it takes to respond to God's
call to be the people of God. Like the people of
Israel (Joshua 3:7-17), he comes to the Jordan
and trusts that he will be brought safely
through the waters into the promise of God's
kingdom. As he does so it is confirmed for
him that he is the Son of God, and that he is
empowered by God's Spirit. That immediately
brings him into a struggle with the selfish
instincts and other evil forces that would
distract him from doing God's will in God's
way. Mark does not tell us what the specific
temptations were, but later in this gospel Jesus
calls Peter "Satan" when Peter suggests that
he should take the benefits of being God's Son
but not act in God's way (Mark 8:31-33). In his
struggle, Jesus is binding up the strong forces
of evil so that he can release other people
from the grip of all that oppresses them (Mark
3:20-27). We are not him, but in our own, more
minor, ways we are invited to do the same.

When Jesus came to Jordan
to be baptized by John,
he did not come for pardon.
but as his Father's Son.
He came to share repentance
with all who mourn their sins,
to speak the vital sentence
with which good news begins.

He came to share temptation,
our utmost woe and loss,
for us and our salvation
to die upon the cross.
So when the Dove descended
on him, the Son of Man,
the hidden years had ended,
the age of grace began.

Come, Holy Spirit, aid us
to keep the vows we make,
this very day invade us,
and every bondage break.
Come, give our lives direction,
the gift we covet most:
to share the resurrection
that leads to Pentecost.

Fred Pratt Green, StF 233

Whether we think of, or speak
to, God, whether we act or
suffer for him, all is prayer, when we
have no other object than his love,
and the desire of pleasing him.

John Wesley

... Wondering

♦ ♦ ♦ Praying

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

Mark 1:14-15

Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming the good news ('gospel') about God and from God – although Mark quickly shows that this good news is supremely focussed and embodied in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus himself.

The time is ripe for making fundamental decisions. In a real sense, God is always in charge of the universe, but we often (or even usually) live as if that were not the case. Now the chance of living as if it were the case is hovering over us. Are we going to trust that message? Are we going to turn to face God and accept it?

To do so will involve us in praying that God's will be done in us and by us in the world. To help us do that intentionally and simply, Jesus taught his followers a pattern of praying for God's kingdom which we call the 'Lord's Prayer'.

Pray then in this way:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

Matthew 6:9-13

Each phrase of this is not so much a prayer as a focus for our meditating and praying. We can know something about God because we know God by name. But God transcends this world and the boundaries of our mind, so we must respect, honour and sanctify God's name. We offer ourselves to do God's will in the world. To do that we shall have to depend on God, looking for the resources to get us through the next 24 hours and then coming back to entrust ourselves to God again the following day. As we look for forgiveness for our failings and sins and what in general we owe to God and others, we are prompted to be forgiving of others for what they owe to us: in other words we need to let forgiveness flow to us and through us. We know that these things are hard to do, and we shall be distracted, tempted, tested and sometimes attacked. Jesus urges us to pray that we are not tested, or that if we are, that we are not brought to our breaking point. For Jesus and his disciples this prayer became real as he wrestled with the will of God in Gethsemane, and asked them to support him (Mark 14:36,38).

♦ ♦ ♦ Calming

Jesus, lover of my soul,
let me to thy bosom fly,
while the nearer waters roll,
while the tempest still is high;
hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
till the storm of life is past;
safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last!

Charles Wesley, StF 355 v. 1

A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he [Jesus] was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.... [from Mark 4:35-41]

Life can get tough. We might feel that we are about to be overwhelmed. We lose sight of those who are in similar boats around us. We start to lose touch with Jesus. But when we turn to him, he is able to hold back the chaos and help us share in his peace. So... who is he?

Prayer continues in the desire of the heart, though the understanding be employed on outward things. ... The bottom of the soul may be in repose, even while we are in many outward troubles; just as the bottom of the sea is calm, while the surface is strongly agitated....

John Wesley

Seeing

And he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.'

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ... Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!' Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

from Mark 9:1-3,7-8

So who and what do we think Jesus is? And what difference will it make to us? Just before this story in Mark, Jesus has asked his disciples what they think. Just before that (Mark 8:22-26) he has enabled someone to see, not instantaneously but in two stages. At the first touch, the person starts to see, but misinterprets what they see. At the second touch, they see clearly. Similarly, Peter starts to see that Jesus is God's anointed agent (that is to say, 'Christ' or 'Messiah'). But he cannot accept that this will involve Jesus being handed over to death (Mark 8:27-33). Then on top of a high mountain Peter, James and John start to see clearly. They start to see Jesus as God might see him. They see how he follows on from those who led God's people and spoke God's word to them in the past. They hear the voice that Jesus heard at his Baptism, confirming that he is the Son of God. Three times Jesus explains that being the Son of God means that he must live in a way that will take him to his death in Jerusalem (Mark 8:31, 9:31, 10:33-4). Each time he links it to a statement that anyone who wishes to follow him must go the same way (Mark 8:34, 9:35, 10:35-45). Then he enables another person to see (Mark 10:46-11:1), and that person immediately follows him into Jerusalem. Will Peter and the disciples? Would we? Will we?

The things unknown to feeble sense, unseen by reason's glimmering ray, with strong commanding evidence their heavenly origin display.

Faith lends its realising light, the clouds disperse, the shadows fly; the Invisible appears in sight, And God is seen by mortal eye.

Charles Wesley, StF 457 verses 5,6

- Approach to God, the start of prayer
- Stillness of Body, Mind and Spirit
- Awareness of the Glory of God's Presence
- Inspiration of the Spirit
- Reading over a Bible verse or passage
- Concentration with Christ
- Silence in God
- Response and Intercession for others
- Blessing

Sharing

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ....

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ... So death is at work in us, but life in you.

from 2 Corinthians 4:5-6,8-10,12

To all the souls he owns for his our master graciously imparts an antepast of heavenly bliss, a glimpse of glory in our hearts: and thus prepared for grief and loss, we die with Jesus on the cross.

Charles Wesley, Poetical Works Vol. X

Jesus, we thus obey your last and kindest word; here, in your own appointed way, we come to meet you, Lord.

Our hearts we open wide to make the Saviour room; and lo! the Lamb, the Crucified, the sinner's friend, is come!

His presence makes the feast; and now our spirits feel the glory not to be expressed, the joy unspeakable.

With pure celestial bliss he does our spirits cheer; his house of banqueting is this, and he hast brought us here.

He bids us drink and eat imperishable food; he gives his flesh to be our meat, and bids us drink his blood.

Whate'er the Almighty can to pardoned sinners give, the fullness of our God made man, we here in Christ receive.

Charles Wesley, StF 590

(with verse 5 above added from Wesley's original text)

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Shared meals are important. They do not just fuel the body, but also deepen relationships and nurture the soul. Elements of them and actions at them can take on great meaning and huge emotional significance. Jesus shared meals with the crowds (eg Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-9), and with individuals and groups, including his disciples (eg Luke 11:37-54; 19:1-10). These culminated in a last supper with his disciples before he was handed over and crucified. At a Passover meal Jews then and now use the elements of the meal to remind them of how God freed them from slavery in Egypt to be his people, and the hardship and the cost, but also the sacrificial love involved. Sometime in the Passover season Jesus held his last supper with his disciples. He went on to identify his body with the bread and his blood with the wine, separated as in a sacrifice. He was prepared to love God and other people even at the cost of his life. In sharing the bread and wine with his disciples, he invited them to share in that with him, to take up their cross and follow him – and to find that he was with them as they did so. He was with them even after his death. It was often at meals that they found that he had been raised to new life (Luke 24:13-35; John 21:1-14). But they had to remember that in raising him to new life, God had not cancelled out his self-giving and suffering love, but affirmed it. So should we. Strengthened in the meal, we are to take up our cross and go with him, proclaiming his death until he comes in the fullness of God's kingdom.

10

♦ ♦ ♦ Sharing

Come, sinners, to the gospel feast,
let every soul be Jesu's guest;
you need not one be left behind,
for God has called all humankind.

Come, all you souls by sin oppressed,
you restless wanderers after rest,
you poor, and maimed, and sick and blind,
in Christ a hearty welcome find.

See him set forth before your eyes;
behold the bleeding sacrifice!
his offered benefits embrace,
and freely now be saved by grace.

Charles Wesley, StF 401 verses 1,3,5

♦ ♦ ♦ Suffering

Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.' And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!' In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, 'He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.' Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'Listen, he is calling for Elijah.' And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.' Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

Mark 15:22-39

11

When I survey the wondrous cross,
on which the Prince of Glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down;
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Isaac Watts, StF 287 verses 1,3

(you can use the mind's eye to look at Christ on the cross, as in this hymn; or your physical eye and a crucifix; or both)

It can be hard to watch someone die, particularly when they do so unjustly and in agony. After their Last Supper, Jesus asked his disciples to pray with him in Gethsemane, and pray that they not be brought to their breaking point. They fell asleep; when danger came, they ran away; Judas betrayed him; Peter denied he ever knew him. In Mark's gospel, only the women who followed him were still there to watch as he died (Mark 14:32-15:41).

At the supper, Jesus had linked the wine to his blood and his sacrificial suffering. He had then said he would not drink wine again until he drank the new wine in the kingdom of God. In Gethsemane he acknowledged that his own will was for the cup of suffering to be taken away from him. But he prayed that God's will be done in and through him on earth, as it is in heaven (Mark 14:36). As he hangs on the cross, he refuses to drink wine drugged with myrrh as a pain-killer (Mark 15:23). Then at the point of death, he accepts sour wine. It is a sharp cup of suffering. But is it also the start of the new wine of the kingdom?

The temple curtain (which had the sun, moon and stars depicted on it – c/f Mark 13:24) is torn in two. One of the soldiers responsible for crucifying him suddenly sees something clearly about Jesus (Mark 15:39). He says what the voice from heaven said about Jesus at his baptism, and to his disciples at the Transfiguration. He was God's Son. He is!

Did you not in our flesh appear,
and live and die below,
that I may now perceive you near,
and my redeemer know?

Come, then, and to my soul reveal
the heights and depths of grace,
the wounds which all my sorrows heal,
that dear, disfigured face.

I view the Lamb in his own light,
whom angels dimly see,
and gaze, transported at the sight,
through all eternity.

Charles Wesley, H&P 184 verses 4,5,6 adpt.

Endless scenes of wonder rise
from that mysterious tree,
crucified before our eyes,
where we our Maker see;
Jesus, Lord, what hast thou done?
Publish we the death divine,
stop, and gaze, and fall, and own
was never love like thine!

Never love nor sorrow was
like that my Saviour showed;
see him stretched on yonder cross,
and crushed beneath our load!
Now discern the Deity,
now his heavenly birth declare;
faith cries out, " 'Tis He, 'tis He,
my God, that suffers there!

Charles Wesley, H&P 166 verses 2,3

And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine!
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
let angel minds enquire no more.

He left his Father's throne above -
so free, so infinite his grace -
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
for, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray -
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Charles Wesley, StF 345

♦ ♦ ♦ Suffering

...Being raised

When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. They had been saying to one another, 'Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?' When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.' So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Mark 16:1-8

14 | This is how Mark's gospel originally seems to have ended. Jesus does not appear in his risen form, there is simply a proclamation that he has been raised to new life. That is all that the men amongst his followers get at first, just like hearing the same proclamation is often the starting point for us two thousand years later. It is the women, the only ones who did not abandon Jesus to the cross, who are asked to pass the message on. At first they are too afraid to do it. Would others believe them? Would they do as they had been asked and go back to Galilee? That is where Jesus had called his disciples and trained them to take part in his mission of announcing the kingdom of God and releasing people from what oppresses them. If they go and do that, it will be in getting on with their mission that they will meet the risen Lord. Will they do it? Will we? The women must eventually have found the courage to pass on the message – the gospel bears witness to it. Will we find the courage to do the same, to speak and to go?

Father of Jesus Christ - my Lord,
my Saviour, and my Head -
I trust in thee, whose powerful word
has raised Him from the dead.

Thou know'st for my offence he died,
and rose again for me,
fully and freely justified
that I might live to Thee.

Faith in thy power thou seest I have,
for thou this faith hast wrought;
dead souls thou callest from their grave,
and speakest worlds from nought.

In hope, against all human hope,
self-desperate - I believe;
thy quickening word shall raise me up,
thou shalt thy Spirit give.

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
and looks to that alone,
laughs at impossibilities,
and cries, "It shall be done!"

Obedient faith, that waits on thee,
thou never wilt reprove,
but thou wilt form thy Son in me,
and perfect me in love.

Charles Wesley, H&P 693

All you that seek the Lord who died,
your God for sinners crucified,
now, let all your grief be o'er!
Believe, and you shall weep no more.

The Lord of life is risen indeed,
to death delivered in your stead;
his rise proclaims your sins forgiven,
and shows the living way to heaven.

Haste then, you souls that first believe,
who dare the gospel word receive,
your faith with joyful hearts confess,
be bold, be Jesus' witnesses.

Go tell the followers of your Lord
their Jesus is to life restored;
he lives to quicken humankind;
he lives that all his life may find.

Charles Wesley, StF 294

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:10-14

If we are prepared to take up our cross and follow Jesus in sharing God's love with people no matter what the cost to ourselves, then we find ourselves living the new life with Christ and in him. But that is not the end of the story. We also find ourselves living between times: the resurrection of Christ and our own new life on the one hand; and on the other, our own resurrection and the recreation and fulfilment of all things. As we give ourselves in worship and mission, we are also being made more holy.

Christ the Lord is risen today: *Alleluia!*
All creation joins to say: *Alleluia!*
Raise your joys and triumphs high: *Alleluia!*
Sing, you heavens, let earth, reply: *Alleluia!*
Soar we now where Christ has led: *Alleluia!*
Following our exalted Head: *Alleluia!*
Made like him, like him we rise: *Alleluia!*
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies: *Alleluia!*

Charles Wesley, StF 298 verses 1,4

♦♦♦ Living for worship and mission

The Church of Christ, in every age beset by change but Spirit-led, must claim and test its heritage and keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street, the victims of injustice cry for shelter and for bread to eat, and never live until they die.

Then let the servant Church arise, a caring Church that longs to be a partner in Christ's sacrifice, and clothed in Christ's humanity.

For he alone, whose blood was shed, can cure the fever in our blood, and teach us how to share our bread and feed the starving multitude.

We have no mission but to serve in full obedience to our Lord: to care for all, without reserve, and spread his liberating Word.

Fred Pratt Green, StF 415

Jesus, we follow thee,
in all thy footsteps tread,
and seek for full conformity
to our exalted Head.

We would, we would partake
thy every state below,
and suffer all things for thy sake,
and to thy glory go.

We in thy birth are born,
sustain thy grief and loss,
share in thy want, and shame, and scorn,
and die upon thy cross.

Baptized into thy death,
we sink into thy grave,
till thou the quickening Spirit breathe,
and to the utmost save.

Thou saidst, 'Where'er I am,
there shall my servants be.'
Master, thy welcome word we claim,
and die to live with thee.

To us who share thy pain,
thy joy shall soon be given,
and we shall in thy glory reign,
for thou art now in heaven.

Charles Wesley, H&P 583

In souls filled with love, the desire to please God is a continual prayer.

.... God only requires of his adult children, that their hearts be truly purified, and that they offer him continually the wishes and vows that naturally spring from perfect love. For these desires, being the genuine fruits of love, are the most perfect prayers that can spring from it.

John Wesley

... Growing in grace and holiness

We are a Methodist people on pilgrimage. We are communities of very different people, sometimes multi cultural and sometimes multi national, connected together in what we call a "Connexion". We gather together seeking to be a group of people like the earliest Methodists in (as John Wesley put it) "having the form [ie the religious practices or method] and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation".

What we have in common is that we all recognise our need of and dependence on the grace of God: the God who loves us before we know it; who saves us through Christ when we do not deserve it; who sanctifies our thoughts, feelings, intentions, words and actions through the Spirit working within us when we are unable to do it for ourselves; who comes to us, is made real for us, nurtures and guides us through various outward and visible and, therefore, sacramental signs.

We seek to embody that grace to others. In effect, we say to people "We have been here and praying whether you knew it or not. **So, you are welcome amongst us, whoever you are and whatever your background, religious or otherwise.**"

We seek holiness, inward and outward, personal and social, in everything. God is at the heart of all things. As Christ's body in various places, we gather and disperse in worship and mission. As we come together and worship we bring with us our concerns for others and the needs of the world. As we disperse and work for the healing, peace and justice of God's love in the world we continue to look for and praise God in everything. Amongst us, we believe, you will find the Word duly preached, the Sacraments duly celebrated, and People duly formed for discipleship in worship and mission.

Methodism began as a society or movement for holiness and a movement for evangelism and mission within the Church of England in the 18th Century. It first became a separate Church in the United States of America. It is now a world-wide family of Methodist Churches, with some 80 million members.

Worship and mission, witness and service, preaching and proclamation, prayer and sacrament all belong together on our pilgrimage through life. One or other may be emphasised at a particular time or by a particular person or group, but if that is to the exclusion of the others it can only be to the detriment of the Church as the body of Christ, and of the kingdom of God.

Captain of Israel's host, and Guide of all who seek the land above,
beneath your shadow we abide,
the cloud of your protecting love;
Our strength, your grace; our rule, your word;
our end, the glory of the Lord.

By your unerring Spirit led,
we shall not in the desert stray;
we shall not full direction need
nor miss our providential way;
as far from danger as from fear,
while love, almighty love, is near.

Charles Wesley, StF 459

(The imagery is drawn from the story of the people of Israel travelling through the wilderness towards the promised land after their exodus from Egypt [see eg Exodus 13:17-22]. The third line of the second verse says that we shall not lack for full direction – in other words, we shall receive it).

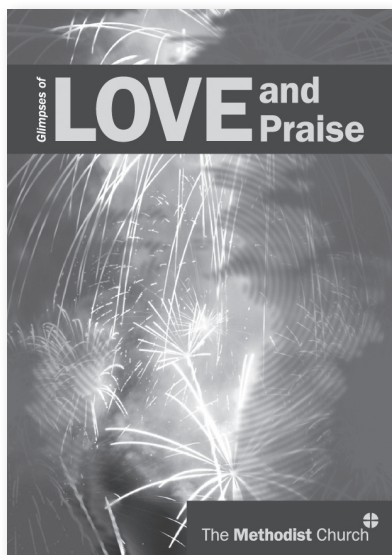
... Changed from glory into glory

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise!

Charles Wesley, StF 503



A pocket-sized, shorter version is available to order. Entitled *Glimpses of Love and Praise*, the illustrated booklet is available in packs of 50 and priced £5 (plus postage and packing).

To order, contact Methodist Publishing on 0845 017 8220 or www.methodistpublishing.org.uk.

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