

“Holiness and Health: God’s Call and Gift”
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Introduction

- A. Health As a Priority within Society and the Church
 - a. Healthcare cost and availability
 - b. Definition of health and relationship to faith/spirituality
- B. Centrality of Health/Healing in Bible and Wesleyan Tradition
 - a. Healing in ministry of Jesus
 - b. Health and healing as component of Wesleyan movement
- C. Thesis: Holiness and health are God’s call and gift and integral to the Christian gospel and the church’s ministry as understood in the Wesleyan tradition.

Holiness and Health: Gifts from Our Wesleyan Tradition¹

- A. Wesley’s Interest in Health and Medicine
 - a. Personal avocation: read widely in medical literature
 - b. Published *Primitive Physick* (23 editions in his lifetime)
 - c. Medical care as part of pastoral care
 - d. Health clinics and dispensaries
- B. Holistic Understanding of Salvation: Healing of body and soul, relationships, and entire creation
 - a. “By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.”²
 - b. Letter to Alexander Knox: “It will be a double blessing if you give yourself up to the Great Physician, that He may heal soul and body together. And unquestionably this is His design. He wants to give you ... both inward and outward health.”³
 - c. Holiness and happiness
 - d. Holiness as “Entire love of God shed abroad in our hearts”
 - e. Healing of whole creation
 - f. Coherence, sense of purpose, part of something bigger as “leading cause of life”: “Human life is sustained by a coherence that generates adaptivity and manages complex relationship.”⁴
- C. Grace That Initiates, Generates, and Sustains Holiness and Health
 - e. Definition: Presence and power of God to create, forgive, reconcile, heal, and transform [prevenient, convicting, justifying, sanctifying, perfecting]
 - f. Grace: universally present
 - g. Gift, not merit or achievement

¹ I am indebted to Randy Maddox for the insights regarding Wesley’s commitment to and understanding of health and holistic salvation. See Maddox’s “A Heritage Reclaimed: John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing,” and his book, *Responsible Grace*

² *Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Pt I, §3, *Works*, 11:106.

³ Letter to Alexander Knox (26 October 1778), *Letters* (Telford) 6:327.

⁴ *Leading Causes of Life*, page 91.

- h. Blessing: “We cannot imagine our lives without blessing as a touchstone. . . . Blessings have an unpredictable and even ferocious power to change the way we envision life and ourselves.”⁵

D. Practices That Form Us in Holiness and Health

- a. Means of grace: prayer, Scripture, Sacraments, worship, “conferencing,” fasting; works of piety and mercy
- b. Our response to God’s presence and power (grace)
- c. Lifetime of growth and maturation
- d. Generosity and wealth sharing
- e. Agency: “Agency is a generative force that inevitably leads to the matter of call. It gives traction to three questions, ‘What am I to do with my life?’, ‘What have I been called to do?’, and ‘Am I doing it?’”⁶

E. Community That Supports Us in Holiness and Health

- a. Social holiness: “The gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness.”⁷ “. . . Christianity is essentially a social religion, and that to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it.”⁸ We cannot be Christian by ourselves; we must have community.
- b. Class meetings and bands as communities of support and accountability
- c. Questions asked in bands: What known sins have you committed since our last meeting? What temptations have you met with? How were you delivered? What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not? Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?⁹
- d. Connection: “. . . human life is *only* found in the extraordinary number of connections humans make with their families, friends, neighbors, faith members, and fellow citizens. Connections are like the breath of air on which our very lives depend.”¹⁰

F. Hope That Pulls and Sustains Us Toward Holiness and Health

- a. Vision of new future: Revelation 21 and new heaven and new earth
- b. Wesley: “. . . we have strong reason to hope that the work he hath begun will carry on unto the day of his Lord Jesus; that he will never intermit this blessed work of his Spirit until he has fulfilled all his promises; until he hath put a period to sin and misery, and infirmity, and death; and re-established universal holiness and happiness, and caused all the inhabitants of the earth to sing together, ‘Hallelujah! The Lord God omnipotent reigneth!’ Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and honour, and power, and might be unto our Lord God forever and ever.”¹¹
- c. Gunderson and Pray: “Informed hope is a leading cause of life. . . . informed hope is grounded in life itself. It is not an event. It is a process. It is not afraid of discouraging facts. . . . Informed hope has a way of saying, ‘Yes, these

⁵ *Leading Causes of Life*, page 124f.

⁶ *Leading Causes of Life*, page 107.

⁷ In the introduction to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739)

⁸ “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount” Discourse IV, Sermon 24, taken from *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, edited by Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, page 195.

⁹ “Rules of the Band Societies,” *Works*, 9:78.

¹⁰ *Leading Causes of Life*, page 63

¹¹ “The General Spread of the Gospel” (Sermon 63), *Works*, Vol. 2, page 499.

untoward events have happened, and there is no way to turn back time. But you still have a life to live. Live it!”¹²

Forming Congregations as Centers of Holiness and Health

- A. Recover Holistic Understanding of Salvation and Health
 - a. Encompasses the whole person, body and spirit; structures and neighborhoods; earth and universe
 - b. God’s gift rather than human achievement
 - c. More than physical wellbeing or absence of pain
 - d. Give priority to teaching: teach, teach, teach
- B. Provide Small Groups of *Support* and *Accountability*
 - a. Cultivate connection, support and accountability in existing groups
 - b. Create new groups: Disciple Bible Study, Covenant Discipleship
- C. Practice the Means of Grace and General Rules: Live the Methodist Way
 - c. Works of piety and mercy
 - d. General Rules: Do no harm, Do good, Attend upon Ordinances (nurture love for God)
- D. Identify and Respond to Health Needs within Community and Congregation
 - a. Consult health and welfare agencies and personnel
 - b. Provide health screenings, clinics, home nurses, pastoral care
- E. Embody Holiness and Health within the Congregation
 - a. Be a means of grace
 - b. Religion is source of sickness and health
Klaus Thomas: Sick religion makes people sick; healthy religion makes for healthy people.

Conclusion

Wesley’s Image of New Creation: All creation is healed
“Hence will arise an unmixed state of holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in paradise. In how beautiful and affecting manner is this described by the Apostle! ‘God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are done away’ (Rev. 21:3-4). As there will be no more death, nor more pain or sickness preparatory thereto; as there will be no more sorrow or crying. Nay, but there will be a greater deliverance than all this; for there will be no more sin. And to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God, a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him.”¹³

The Church’s call and gift is to embody and live toward that vision of holiness and health!

¹² *Leading Causes of Life*, page 133.

¹³ “The New Creation,” (Sermon 64), in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, edited by Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, page 500.