

BALANCING EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP IN IVCF:
LEARNING LESSONS FROM JOHN WESLEY
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INTRODUCTION In 18th century England, God wanted to birth an amazing movement of his Spirit among the desperate working poor. He wanted to meet them in their poverty, show them how much he loved them, and call them into a transforming relationship with himself. The Church of England, however, was tragically out of synch with God, and was also generally very alienated from the needy proletariat. Despite his church's resistance, God still poured out his Spirit on this unreached segment of the country. And in order to shepherd them effectively, God put his Spirit on John Wesley: 1) to transform him personally; 2) to press him into the world of these neglected and highly immoral non-Christians; and 3) to guide him as he led an amazing model-movement of evangelism and discipleship.

My purpose in this paper is two-fold: 1) to learn the lessons from Wesley's life that made him such an outstanding leader of this movement of evangelism; and 2) to connect as many of these lessons as possible to our current U.S. context, specifically for those of us on staff with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship as we strain to follow God's call to us to become a movement of very fruitful evangelism to the postmodern student generations of the 21st century. I will also write this from my own perspective as a budding evangelist at UCLA, and I hope to utilize Wesley to shed light on my own experience these past few years. I should add that my presupposition is that God again wants to pour out his Spirit on this lost generation of students, and I would like to wonder out loud about what it will take for us to get in line with God's hand on our campuses.

THEIR CONTEXT The genius and strength of Wesley's leadership can not be properly appreciated until we get a glimpse of what he was up against in his day. As the 18th century began, England was ripe for revival, but neither the Church of England nor the Dissenting Church were attuned to God's Spirit or the needs of the English people. Industrialization was hitting England with full force, creating a virtual revolution in how society functioned. The poor working class was exploding in size in the urban centers, yet they were sorely neglected by the aristocracy, the government, and the church. Left to their own demise, they gave themselves over to promiscuity, violence, and despair. Stuck in this state of depravity, they were a very unappealing segment of the population to be around, not to mention minister to.

The Church of England had four major impediments blocking it from effectively offering the gospel to this new, lost generation in their midst. First of all, the Church was entrenched in a very ineffective communication style in its preaching. The Church of England had been embattled in the fight against Deism for decades. (MacArthur 1936:48) To win this war for people's minds, the Church had embraced a very sophisticated and philosophical approach to its preaching ministry which definitely catered to the scholars and academically minded. Even if the new working poor had tried to come to church, they literally could not have even understood the bulk of what the average Anglican preacher said on a Sunday morning.

Secondly, the Church of England had been significantly influenced by the Catholic Church, and was teaching what amounted to a theology of salvation by works. To make matters worse, the Church was paralyzed from changing their message because the government kept a very tight reign on what

the Church could and could not teach. (Wood 1967:79) Therefore, the Church was basically void of the good news that the general population so desperately needed to hear.

Thirdly, the Church had tremendous organizational barriers to meeting the needs of the new generation of English. The Church had a strict parish system set up which carefully regulated where ministers could be assigned, how they would be paid, and who could teach in their pulpits. The lines which divided the parishes had been drawn up in a previous century to meet the needs of those previous generations. Not only was the Church miserably ineffective in reaching this new generation, but in addition they did not even realize how much they were failing in their God-given mission. They were deluded into assuming that if the poor working class wanted God, they would leave their slums and come to the previously existing churches. The poor would have had to leave their neighborhoods, their “turf”, in order to get onto the “turf” of the Church of England. The Church defined their job very narrowly, assuming to themselves something akin to: “as long as we are running our church and our parish well, we are being faithful to God’s call to us; God will bring the non-Christians to us when he is ready.” By choosing to only being concerned for the people who lived in their immediate parish vicinities, they maintained a very narrow view of who they were spiritually responsible for, thereby effectively deceiving themselves into thinking that they were doing an adequate job ministering to their nation. They expected the new generation to be blessed by a century-old church system; but, not surprisingly, the new social order completely ignored the Church’s parish lines and grew exponentially in the neighborhoods where there were no churches at all. The lost became even more lost, because the church was tragically stuck in both a wrong self-perception and in a naive and simplistic understanding of their mission field.

Lastly, the hearts of the Christians were generally cold toward the lost. A deadly form of Calvinism kept them believing that no one needed to urge the lost to consider Jesus. The elect would just magically just be drawn into the Kingdom of God and into their churches. Also, the strong influence of elitism and erudition kept the church from even wanting the non-Christians around. The coal miners were literally filthy all the time from the mines, and the Christians truly did not want them in their churches, soiling their pews. If only the Christians had had God’s heart for that needy generation and the courage to act on that love, they would have been able to at least in part overcome these first three barriers. But their hardness of heart effectively sounded the death knoll for them in terms of being of any use to God in his desire to reach that needy generation.

OUR CONTEXT Drawing the similarities from Wesley’s century to our own might be profoundly helpful for us as we strive to reach postmodern students. In terms of generational comparisons, the majority of postmodern students have been raised to believe that truth and meaning in life can be found in following their own urges and desires with abandon. This experiential groping has led them into the current mire of promiscuity, narcissism, and numbness. On our end, I see some direct comparisons between us and the four barriers that constrained the Church of England:

- 1) We Christian leaders have a way of communicating the gospel in a language and style that sounds good to us, but that makes very little sense to the average postmodern student. When we share the gospel, the new generation seldom hears anything in what we are saying which resembles good news to them. This should trouble us tremendously, because if it isn’t good news to their ears, it really isn’t good news at all. We need a whole new postmodern paradigm on the gospel and what makes for good news and how to communicate it effectively. We must put on the new generation’s mindset so that we can both see Jesus and the world in a whole new way.

2) Though we seldom err on the side of a salvation-by-works theology, I wonder if we are stuck in our own theological trap. I wonder if we fail to offer a gospel of hope and transformation because we fail to offer the real call of Jesus in all its weight and totality. I have talked to numerous postmodern non-Christians who are tired of the t.v. evangelist's offer of "cheap grace" which is supposed to make all of their problems magically disappear under the blood of Jesus. They want and need a Jesus who really changes lives and offers real solutions to real problems. I think we need an honest, pragmatic evangelism that glorifies Jesus in the eyes of this generation.

3) Postmodern students are not going to fit nicely into our current paradigms and structures which were largely formed by another generation for another bygone era. In fact, a significant segment of postmoderns on our campuses have also never stepped foot in a church and would never come to an InterVarsity Large Group meeting even if we befriended them for four years straight. Who must change: us or them? Unless we change, postmodern non-Christians will be obliged to largely ignore InterVarsity as an irrelevant institution on campus.

4) In the area of love for the lost, I see us as already much improved over Wesley's Church of England. Of course, we need more courage to act on our love for our non-Christian friends. But I sense that every Region has chapters where real love for the lost is a strength.

RAISING UP A LEADER FOR THE WORK OF GOD John Wesley started out as a true product of the 18th century Church of England, and all that that entailed. The first three blocks mentioned above were also powerful strongholds inside his own heart and mind, prior to his famous experience of regeneration at Aldersgate in 1738. The sheep of England were ready for revival, but most of them had never stepped foot in a church their whole lives. They desperately needed a shepherd, but there were too many barriers up between them and the Church for them to step into the Christian world. Unfortunately, instead of going to the sheep in need, the shepherds were busy philosophizing. God had to pick a person that he could pluck out of that religious stagnation and transform into a fruitful evangelist. Wesley needed to be transformed from the inside out in order to get him to shake loose these powerful old paradigms which kept him from evangelism.

There are many key sovereign foundations which God put into John Wesley's early life which later allowed him to be the disciplined, organized, and passionate leader of such an amazing evangelistic ministry. First of all, God gave Wesley an enduring love for and loyalty to the Church of England, and Wesley effectively used his ordination in that Church all his life to keep his connection to the Church alive. This loyalty only paid off in obvious ways very late in his life, when the Church of England opened their doors and hearts to Wesley again after 50 years of persecuting him. But by the time they did open to Wesley, they were really opening in a whole new way to the Spirit of God, whom they had been ignoring for years.

Through the Church of England, God also prepared Wesley by opening his preaching ministry. Preaching would become Wesley's "bread and butter" ministry strategy for the rest of his life. God also gave Wesley the indispensable experiences with his "Holiness Club" at Oxford where he learned the power of total vulnerability and accountability to ensure growth as a disciple. This small group strategy would later form the backbone of his ingenious follow up discipleship structure. In addition, God intentionally made him a recognized Oxford scholar so that Wesley would hold authority and legitimacy both with the upper class and lower class all of his life. This dual respect

uniquely allowed Wesley to create a unifying movement between the upper and lower classes of England. He became the bridge for profound social reconciliation. All of these sovereign foundations would prove indispensable for Wesley's leadership. However, none of them were of any good to him until he himself experienced the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in his heart. (We know from his failed missionary trip to America, which came several years before his conversion experience, that all of his leadership skills and Church authority amounted to nothing apart from the power of God.)

In order to have something to offer others, Wesley first needed to be redeemed and ignited by the gospel. At Aldersgate, his soul came to life on May 24, 1738, when he first realized what it meant to be saved by faith in Jesus, and not by the good things he tried to do for God. (Wood 1967:67) Before this point, he knew that the goal of his life and the life of every Christian was real holiness. However, before Aldersgate he did not know how to get there. He had the structure (the Holiness Club), but not the power. After this date, Wesley now had a message that he would give to the world. For the next 50 years, he would preach an average of 3 sermons a day. This explosive preaching literally started immediately after his Aldersgate experience. He knew instantly that God had tapped him into some very good news that everyone of his day desperately needed. Because he had no philosophy of ministry nor strategy to guide him, he did what any Anglican preacher would have done in his place: he gave sermon after sermon in the churches who invited him.

If God had not directly intervened at this point and given Wesley a new strategy and philosophy of ministry, Wesley might never have become an evangelist for the poor. At the core, Wesley was a holiness advocate (we would call it "Lordship"), preaching true union with Christ and a total new life of obedience to Jesus in the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. He had a natural passion for church-background people like himself coming into saving faith like he had. He had no prior experience with the coal miners and the new generation of the Industrial Revolution. God was preparing Wesley for evangelism out in the fields, in the places where the lower class lived.

But Wesley was profoundly stuck in his old paradigm, that the only proper place for preaching the gospel was in the Church. Less than one year after his conversion experience, Wesley received an invitation from George Whitefield who had pioneered field evangelism in England. Whitefield had been preaching to enormous crowds of the working poor in Bristol, and he needed someone to help him respond to the phenomenal moving of the Spirit he was seeing. All of Wesley's friends opposed his going to Bristol, as did his own heart. Ironically, it was only after the drawing of lots that God twisted Wesley's arm into becoming a field evangelist. (Wesley 1989:47) Here is how Wesley records that first week of his cataclysmic paradigm shift:

"In the evening I reached Bristol, and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday; having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church...At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation...to about three thousand people." (1989:47)

To say that Wesley was a reluctant field evangelist is an understatement. He was extremely suspicious of this new approach to preaching, and it even made him feel "vile" in his own eyes. However, to his credit, he knew the value of obeying Jesus' call, even when it went against every other sensibility in him. At last, God had helped Wesley become the evangelist he wanted him to

be: a sanctification fanatic with a heart for the gospel, now with an innovative platform for his evangelistic ministry.

THE PARALLEL TO IVCF I wonder if Wesley's life might work as an apt allegory for us in InterVarsity. Our background, like Wesley's, is very strong in Lordship. The idea of jumping into a whole new world of innovative evangelism just doesn't feel like us. We feel much more comfortable speaking in a Large Group meeting to mostly church-background students than we do a room full of aloof skeptics and agnostics. I wonder if we in InterVarsity are symbolically standing in that large field for our first open-air sermon. God has twisted our arm, and though we may feel "vile" in our own eyes, we are trying some very new approaches to evangelism, without ever wanting to lose our Lordship and discipleship core.

Personally, I am comforted by Wesley because he was a field evangelist by force. God had to force huge paradigm shifts on us at UCLA to get us to embrace a regular incarnational evangelism structure two years ago. It is very scary to get launched into the non-Christian world, and we might wonder if we are sinning by merely being a part of this unorthodox venture. But God wants to give us courage through models like Wesley. He had been well-prepared and well-invested in by God to get him to that point of decision making. And now God was taking him by the hand into a whole new area of ministry, and he needed to be obedient. We also have scores of young staff whom God has plucked out from their generation, and he has been investing in us so that he can get us ready to launch us into whole new ministries of fruitful, incarnational evangelism on our campuses. Now we just have to be obedient to the call.

HOW WESLEY BORE FRUIT THAT LASTS John Wesley was an extremely effective evangelist. By the end of his life, crowds would flock to hear him all over England, numbering up toward 20,000 listeners a day. But that was not his strongest suit. On top of his preaching, he was a master strategist who saw himself as shepherding a whole movement of evangelism. He poured himself into the raising up and training of young, like minded evangelists. By the end of his life, he had equipped 690 circuit preachers, or traveling evangelists. (Jebanathan 1985:77) Also, he never lost focus on what happened to his converts once they had made their commitments to Jesus. Because of this preoccupation with follow-up, when he died he had an amazing 72,000 thriving disciples of Jesus that he could count as the fruit of his ministry. (Abelove 1990:5) Therefore, we are compelled to get inside the mind, the will, and the heart of this great leader in order to gain all we can from his model. In order to learn from Wesley's philosophy of ministry, let us examine three unique components of who God made him to be: 1) his strategic genius, 2) his true courage, and 3) his white-hot passion.

I STRATEGIC GENIUS First of all, Wesley refused to fall prey to the "either/or" struggles that have eventually undermined the ministries of many evangelists in history. Wesley was an excellent "both/and" leader; he was absolutely committed to both evangelism and discipleship in every part of his ministry. He would simply not tolerate either one or the other to overtake his movement. He was able to effectively maintain this dual foci because he was convinced that true Kingdom growth produces simultaneously both deeper communities of committed disciples, and expanding communities of new disciples. To lose either one would have been an unthinkable tragedy for Wesley.

"We must build [make disciples] with one hand, while we fight [evangelize] with the other. And this is the great work, not only to bring souls to believe in Christ, but to build them up in our most holy

faith. How grievously are they mistaken who imagine that, as soon as the children are born, they need take no more care of them!" (1872: XIII, 23)

He told his preachers that they must always be focused on the nurture of those they help into the Kingdom, because otherwise "converts without nurture are like still-born babies" (Outler 1971:23). Accordingly, he made a personal commitment to never preach the gospel where he could not ensure that good follow-up would ensue. In his Journal, he wrote, "The devil himself desires nothing more than this, that the people of any place should be half-awakened and then left to themselves to fall asleep again." (Hunter 1982:14) Wesley was so committed to seeing his people grow in their holiness and obedience that he declared that "this doctrine of full sanctification is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists, and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appears to have raised us up" (Morgan 1957:18).

Given that Wesley had such an absolute sense of calling to help people grow in their sanctification, it is truly a marvel that he could also be so resolute about constant growth in evangelism and conversions. Once Wesley saw that the Spirit of God was moving on the lower classes through his field preaching, he determined that he would never go back to settling for merely reaching those from church backgrounds. As he saw God bring fruit through his evangelism, he gained extreme pleasure from knowing that he could be used by God to reach those who otherwise would never have heard the gospel. Twenty years after starting field evangelism, he wrote in his Journal about his ministry that day: "Many were there who would never come to a (church). Oh what a victory Satan would gain if he could put an end to field preaching! But that, I trust, he never will; at least not until my head is laid." (Wood 1967:99) How did he get to this point of such commitment to non-Christians? A fundamental transformation happened for Wesley within a year of his conversion. He went from seeing churches as his ministry base to seeing "the world as his parish". (1967:105) It was no longer okay for him that a generation was going without the gospel. He realized that he was equipped and anointed by God to do something about their lack.

As a point in contrast, it was widely recognized that George Whitefield, Wesley's Barnabas, was an even better preacher than Wesley. However, Whitefield sorely lacked the strategic genius that made his friend Wesley such a great evangelistic leader. Whitefield compared his ministry with Wesley's and confessed, "...my brother Wesley acted wisely. The souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class [small groups], and thus preserved the fruits of his labours. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand" (Jackson 1839:69). Whitefield labored diligently to become a good and fruitful evangelist. Helping people come to know Jesus was his all-consuming passion. Yet his lack of excellent strategy cost him dearly, and even he saw his fruit fading right before his eyes.

So how did Wesley accomplish the impossible? How did he get fruit that lasts? He had a God-given goal, he created a strategy to achieve that goal, and he styled his preaching to honor that goal. He never took his eyes off his goal: maturity, obedience, and real sanctification for every member of his movement. It is no accident that Wesley's movement produced tens of thousands of profoundly committed disciples of Jesus. That was Wesley's vision from the beginning, and he made sure that he did everything in his power to fulfill that vision. He knew from the start that he would never be satisfied with followers who were a "rope of sand" falling between his fingers. So he made the hard choices to ensure the implementation of his vision. He created structures that would make his goal a living reality in the lives of his followers. He brought his experience of deep Christian community from the Holiness Club into the Methodist movement. He knew that every

believer needs concrete help fleeing from sin, so he provided the strategy and training to make sure that this happened for every convert. Needless to say, Wesley's vision and intentionality paid off enormously.

John Wesley also developed an excellent theology of what he expected in his evangelistic preaching that both he and his preachers adhered to which helped their fruit last. He was very particular about what would and would not pass for evangelistic, or gospel preaching, and he would be critical of most of what passes for "preaching the gospel" today.

"If we duly join faith and works in all our preaching, we shall not fail of a blessing. But of all preaching, what is usually called gospel preaching is the most useless, if not the most mischievous; a dull, yea or lively, harangue on the sufferings of Christ or salvation by faith without strongly inculcating holiness. I see more and more that this naturally tends to drive holiness out of the world." (Wood 1967:149)

He was not satisfied with any preaching that did not end in changed lives and people who were motivated to become Jesus' disciples. If one of his preachers articulately explained justification by faith alone, but they did not call for the audience to then have a radical change of lifestyle, Wesley would be angry indeed. Sanctification and holiness were not things that could wait until a sermon on discipleship. Every convert needed to know ahead of time that Jesus would call for nothing less than full obedience and transformation.

"I find more profit in sermons on either good temper or good works than in what are vulgarly called gospel sermons...(they) bawl out something about Christ and His blood or justification by faith, and his hearers cry out, 'What a fine sermon!' Surely the Methodists have not so learned Christ. We know no gospel without salvation from sin." (1967:149)

Talking about forgiveness of sin without practical calls to live a life free from the habits of sin was a complete waste of time for Wesley. Every evangelistic message needed a very practical component to deal with obedience issues and sanctification. Wesley expected new converts to know that being a Christian meant to leave behind the old life and embrace a new lifestyle of holiness. He had no patience for "cheap grace", offering justification without sanctification. Did this unorthodox evangelism pay off? As stated before, 72,000 people found regeneration under this high-bar, full-gospel, whole-counsel-of-God style of evangelistic preaching.

In order to ensure that no one was mistaken about what it would take to become a follower of Jesus, Wesley would never call for conversion or offer the gift of salvation in a sermon. Instead, he would invite those who were interested to come and meet with him afterwards so that he could privately explain to them what the life of faith looked like. (Wood 1967:165) He did not want anyone sliding into the Kingdom before they knew what they were getting into. Wesley truly molded his life and ministry around this commitment to avoid at all costs producing mere converts, but instead to see lasting disciples of Jesus come out of his movement.

INTERVARSITY STRATEGY I believe that it is to our distinct advantage that InterVarsity is not, by nature, traditionally an evangelism movement. If we were, we might easily focus all of our energy on developing better evangelism for postmodern students and accidentally end up losing all of our converts as "still-born babies". Instead, as we move ahead in evangelistic innovation, we must cherish our dedication to Lordship and sanctification. If we ever neglect discipleship, our

evangelism is a waste of time. We must always proceed in our evangelism with costly discipleship as our conscious goal for every convert. If we lose our sight from the end goal, we too will never have the kind of fruit that lasts and that honors Jesus. Let us emulate John Wesley in his high expectations for his ministry. We should not stand idly by while our chapters are either strong in discipleship or evangelism. Instead, let us build discipleship into our chapters with one hand while we bring good news to non-Christians with the other. It is time for “both/and” leadership in InterVarsity!

For us at UCLA, it has been so refreshing to be freed from any last vestiges of the “either/or” false dichotomy that we were stuck in for years. Wesley is right: evangelism and discipleship do fit beautifully together in our chapter, but I’m not sure I would have believed it until I have seen it for myself. It is a true joy to be able to expect both at the same time, and then to see God bring it about.

We in InterVarsity must also create our own models of evangelistic preaching to avoid the trap of “cheap grace” evangelism. Not only is that type of preaching bad evangelism, but this generation in particular is hurting for a gospel that changes lives. Let us include in our speaking the hard punch of lifestyle change in such a way that makes it sound extremely attractive to postmoderns. Also, let us not be too quick to offer easy invitations to salvation before students really even know what we are talking about. Our Investigative Bible Discussions (IBD’s) are an excellent follow-up structure where the call to conversion can come when students really know who Jesus is and what the call to his Kingdom is all about.

I have struggled to learn how to integrate my desire for generationally relevant evangelistic talks with my desire for upholding my high-bar goal of wanting to see changed lives and real discipleship. But I have found that if I am willing to take the time to re-work my talks 4 or 5 times, God will show me how to make costly discipleship very attractive to non-Christians. Also, we have adopted Wesley’s style of not calling for conversion at our monthly evangelistic events which we call “The Edge”. Instead, it works very well to just call the non-Christians to grow in specific areas of their lives, and then to let our IBD’s do our harvesting for us.

II COURAGE TO BE INCARNATIONAL We saw previously from Wesley’s own journal how hard it was for him to get out of his Church approach to ministry and get into the world of the non-Christians and their needs. It is hard for us to fathom how revolutionary and truly incarnational field preaching was for Wesley and 18th Century England. The non-Christians were consistently shocked to see a man of the cloth come out to speak to them in his fine preachers robe and wig. (Abelove 1990:7) Many of them came to hear Wesley speak merely because they could not believe their ears that a member of the aristocracy would actually get into their world. Wesley gave up his right to speak in an environment that he enjoyed in order to give the good news to people who would never hear other wise. He wrote, “What marvel the devil does not love field preaching! Neither do I: I love a commodious room, a soft cushion, a handsome pulpit. But where is my zeal, if I do not trample all these underfoot in order to save one more soul?” (Wood 1967:95)

Wesley was a through and through Oxford scholar. Yet all that he counted as dung for the sake of the gospel. The crowds were often rude and unruly, sometimes even turning violently against Wesley. He truly risked his life to be in the volatile world of the non-Christians, but it was worth it because he knew they would never come to him for the message of transformation. Such

self-displacement required great courage again and again from Wesley, but in the end he knew it was always worth the risk. He also had to leave behind his scholarly style of speaking, and instead develop a very plain and straight forward style that the common person could understand and respond to. Wesley, by upbringing, was an avid fan of high church worship music and hymns. It pained him to have to work with his brother Charles to write low brow hymns that would carry the gospel in song for to the lower class. (Hunter 1987:45) Yet again, God strengthened him with courage to lay aside his musical preferences and learn to worship God in a way that the coal miners could enjoy. Wesley worked very hard for 50 years to get into the world of the non-Christians of his day. He paid enormous costs as he worked to earn the trust of the lower class day after day.

FOR INTERVARSITY Here the application for us is obvious. We need the same strong dose of courage from the Holy Spirit to get us out of our Large Group Meetings and into the world of the non-Christians. Why are we satisfied with reaching a few seekers on campus through our Large Group meetings while there are thousands of skeptics and cynics out there who would never step foot into our meetings? Wesley preferred his pulpit to evangelistic preaching. We prefer our Large Group meetings to creating new and effective styles of evangelistic speaking for postmoderns. Why? Because we lack the courage to step out of what we know and step into the unknown and scary world of non-Christians. We don't like their music? Wesley didn't like their music. But Jesus' love takes us out of our own Christian culture and into their culture.

As we are led by Jesus to be missionaries to postmodern students, we should expect to have to change and leave behind what is comfortable and familiar to us. We should expect to learn whole new ways of speaking. We should expect to use movies and songs in our evangelism that we would never naturally select if left to our own desires. We need to be open to new ways to connect with this generation. (For example, given my personality, I would never have paid to see Titanic. But it became a useful movie as a connection to our generation and as a basis for our Edge. So I swallowed my pride and went to see the movie.) We should expect to have to work very hard to earn the trust of the non-Christians. What would it look like if we started over and re-built our chapters right there in the middle of postmodern, non-Christian culture? Such a risky move would communicate volumes to the non-Christians because they would have seen some genuine good news finally lived out in their world! God would be honored by such courage.

III UNCOMMON PASSION FOR GOD'S KINGDOM Wesley's heart was aflame with the hope that God's Kingdom was on the verge of breaking out in power in unexpected places. He knew God's Spirit was always at work drawing people to Himself, and that he merely had to keep his eyes open to where the Spirit might be at work. His robust confidence in God to change lives translated into a conviction that the fields were always ripe for harvest somewhere. "For the early Wesleyan movement, the fields were always 'ripe unto harvest' -- an affirmation so often repeated that it became a cliché" (Hunter 1982:21) He and his preachers just had to catch people when they were receptive. He had an acute awareness that the same person who was closed to God one day might be closed to God the next. He ministered with a Kingdom optimism that all people are receptive at some point in their life. He just had to keep preaching the gospel and pray to catch them at that ripe opportunity. Wesley explains his view of how God's Spirit works in the lives of non-Christians in his sermon, "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption":

...(God) puts them in fear, so that, for a season at least, the Heathen, 'know themselves to be but men.' They feel the burden of sin and earnestly desire to flee from the wrath to come. But not

long; they seldom suffer the arrows of conviction to go deep into their souls; but quickly stifle the grace of God, and return to their wallowing in the mire” (Hunter 1982:23)

Accordingly, Wesley charged his preachers to work urgently when ever they sensed receptivity. He never wanted a harvest to spoil. This urgency then became ingrained in Wesley’s character, which he also passed on to his preachers.

Wesley also had a life-long passion to see more people included in the fold of God’s love. When one of his groups would shrink in size and diminish in effectiveness in reaching the lost, he became alarmed. In his Journal on July 6, 1788, Wesley records how he visited a church of twenty that used to be fifty. His interpretation: “What can be done to remedy this sore evil?” (Wesley 1989:473) He could have merely conceded that it must have been the will of God that this church shrink. Not for Wesley. His passion was that every Methodist would be a missionary, and that every non-Christian be given more chances to respond to the gospel. To him, a group of Christians who failed to reach out and grow was a “sore evil”. Wesley expected growth and conversions, and because he expected so much from God and from his people, he usually got what he expected.

Wesley also had very high expectations of his preachers. In training them, he said, “You have one business on earth -- to save souls. Give yourself wholly to this. The test of a true preacher is whether or not his preaching is changing lives” (Wesley 1789:VIII, 310). But he also held himself to this same high standard. In a letter to his brother Charles on April 26, 1772, he wrote, “Your business as well as mine is to save souls...I think every day lost which is not employed in this thing.” (Wood 1967:148) Because John Wesley diligently kept his focus on his God-given mission, his heart remained ablaze with love for people becoming followers of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

Will we in InterVarsity rise up and make the hard decisions which are necessary if we are to be used by God in a much more powerful way in evangelism? Are we willing to expect much more from ourselves and our chapters in the effort to seek and save the lost? Will we remain content with chapter building, or will we let God ignite in us a Godly dissatisfaction with the status quo? If we step up, I believe that over the next ten years, we will witness first hand God pouring our his Spirit in a new way on the postmodern students that we are ministering to.

May John Wesley’s life be an encouragement of what we can become as we trust God with our lives and our chapters.

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