

Study Guide
Series: The Wesley Challenge
“On Making America Great Again”

Sunday - *Am I proud?* - Psalm 139:13-14, Ephesians 2:4-10. We all know that person who walks around as if they were puffed up with air, proud of their bank account statement, their title, their looks, their ability. Sometimes, we're even those people! St. Augustine once said that pride is “the love of one's own excellence.” This goes beyond simply healthy self-esteem. This is a perspective that says we are somehow superior. Take comfort in the fact that you are valuable and precious to God. But so is everyone else. So, what are your strengths, from God's perspective? Are you ever tempted to think and act as though those strengths make you superior to other people? Are there places in your life where you are masking insecurities with pride? Are you able to be happy when someone else succeeds or gains praise, or does it make you feel threatened? What's the difference between healthy self-esteem and pride? Can you recall a time when you successfully overcame a sense of unhealthy pride? If so, what helped you to do that? Do you have anyone in your life who can honestly challenge you on pridefulness? Or if anyone challenges you, do you immediately become defensive? Ask God to help you find security in Him and to free you from the need to feel superior.

Monday - *Am I defeated in any part of my life?* - John 16:33, Romans 7:21-25. To admit that we are defeated is an act of courage. To admit that we need help is bravery. To admit that our stability, strength and sustainability come from God is an act of worship. We honor God when we declare our need for God's help. The Psalms were filled with constant cries for help. The Apostle Paul memorably wrote, “I'll gladly spend my time bragging about my weaknesses so that Christ's power can rest on me...when I'm weak, then I'm strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). In what areas of your life do you often feel defeated? What are the warning signs in your life that help you see your need for help and support? Is there anything that you could change, such as personal habits like healthier eating or exercise that would help you overcome feeling defeated? Read this verse every day for the next week to remind yourself where your strength to overcome comes from: “The Lord is my solid rock, my fortress, my rescuer. My God is my rock—I take refuge in him!—he's my shield, my salvation's strength, my place of safety” (Psalm 18:2).

Tuesday - *Do I go to bed on time and get up on time?* - Genesis 2:2-3, Psalm 3:3-6. Wesley's question, “Do I go to bed on time and get up on time?” is about being rested for the work of God in the world. However, his question also points to our willingness to live a disciplined life in general. “Do I go to bed on time and get up on time?” is like code for “Are you rested and at your best to meet the challenges of the day, and ultimately represent God well and help make the world a better place?” Think about a time you've felt exhausted and depleted. What was your behavior like at that time? How good were the decisions you made when you were in that state of exhaustion? How would you answer John Wesley's question, both on the surface level (adequate hours of sleep) and on its deeper level (rested enough to make the world a better place)? Choose a reasonable bedtime this week, one that will provide you with a good amount of rest, and stick to it. Don't allow emails, television, or anything else that really can wait until the next day to interfere with that time you've set.

Wednesday - *Do I grumble or complain constantly?* - Philippians 2:14-16. Are you a constant complainer? It's easy to find out: ask the people around you. When we complain, we think we are just making observations about reality. But constant complaining creates an alternative reality that leads us to shirk responsibility and blame others for our discontent. Wesley called us to ask ourselves and one another this question so that we can replace negative with positive thoughts, and start developing new habits marked by hope and optimism. Do you think you are optimistic or pessimistic by nature? What kind of feedback have you received from people in your life about this aspect of your personality? Do you believe it is possible to reframe your approach to circumstances to view them in a positive vs. negative light? What could help you do this? Think about any constant grumblers you know. What choices might be driving their negative outlook? Who do you know who is consistently a "glass half-full" person? Observe closely what decisions and practices seem to help them live their lives this way.

Thursday - *Am I a slave to dress, friends, work or habits?* - 1 Timothy 6:7-9. The underlying principle behind this question of Wesley's is simply: Who or what owns us? What consumes us? Who or what do we allow to control our life? When we are a slave to something or someone, it clearly means that we take our direction from a controlling person or object that is not God. We are called toward a healthy, balanced life of serving the Kingdom virtues we see in the life of Christ. What controls your life? Be honest with yourself. What is the focus of most of your thoughts? What preoccupies you? How much time, effort and focus would be available for your participation in the mission of God if this factor did NOT preoccupy your life? Ask your spouse or a trusted friend to alert you when they notice you "feeding" this preoccupation in a way that limits your ability to allow God to control your life. One of the best ways to control or curb your enthusiasm for things in your life that consume you other than God's mission is to consistently serve others. Find a place to serve regularly, to help rebalance the priorities in your life.

Friday - *How do I spend my spare time?* - 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13. A 2014 Bureau of Labor Statistics survey said that, on average, employed Americans age 25-54 with children sleep 7.7 hours a day. Of the remaining 16.3 hours, people in that group average 2.5 hours of leisure time, what we might assume Wesley meant by "spare time". It is essential to determine where in your day you have spare time. You must also find what you should do with that time. This is not a time to answer emails you didn't get to during your hours of work! Wesley proposed this as a key question for Christians so that we can determine which activities help us be refreshed, renewed and refocused on the essential priorities of our lives. Wesley (and Jesus) both want to make sure that we are not wasting time that we could be using to strengthen our daily pursuit of becoming deeply committed Christians. What activities bring you the most enjoyment and make you feel the most refreshed and energized? How much of your spare time do you spend on these pursuits? If it's less than you would like, how can you restructure your time so that you are spending it in ways that brings you life?

Saturday - *Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?* - Philippians 2:3-4. It is healthy to be self-aware. However, being too aware of self can make us self-absorbed if we're not careful. Wesley wanted us to reflect on the question, "Am I self-conscious, self-pitying or self-justifying?" so that we confront our human desire to be so concerned with "self" that we lose sight of the "others" in our lives. Do yourself a favor. Reflect carefully and act swiftly on the core of what Wesley was getting at in today's question. Watch it change the way you see the

world and also the way others see you. How often do you attempt something you will be “bad” at? If your answer is “rarely,” why do you think that is? Are you afraid of being embarrassed or looking foolish to others? Are you worried about criticism, or is it because you have an excessive need to always be the “best”? Has anyone ever told you that you are self-absorbed, self-pitying, or self-justifying? What were the circumstances of that encounter? What, if anything, did you learn about yourself as a result? Ask God to help you to be less concerned about yourself and more about your mission for this world.