

Study Guide

Series: Wesley Challenge

“The Spiritual Life”

Sunday - Is Jesus real to me? - John 3:3-17. Wesley’s question, “Is Jesus real to me?” may be the most important of all the 21 questions. It gets at the point of our Christian pursuit of holiness and witness. Wesley wanted Christians to make sure that we are not simply following a religion, but experiencing a relationship with Jesus. When Jesus is real to us, that reality shows itself to us and others through its impact on our words, actions, disciplines and practices. Discipleship, the spiritual growth process of becoming a deeply committed Christian, isn’t about outward piety. Rather, it’s about how Jesus is experienced by a person. When has Jesus seemed the most real to you in your life? The least real? What were those circumstances? Jesus becomes more real to us through the practices of discipleship each day. Scripture reading, study, prayer, mission work, fasting, moments of solitude, submission to God’s will for our life and joining authentic community all change the lens through which we view the world. How can you make Jesus more real to you now? What discipleship practices can you put into your life to become a more deeply committed Christian?

Monday - Am I enjoying prayer? - Luke 11:1-4. To enjoy prayer is to simply have a good prayer experience. Prayer is meant to be a positive and enriching worship experience. To pray, and enjoy it, is to regularly engage in the practice of prayer, and as a result find a deeper understanding of God, self, others and the world. When we pray well, we learn to enjoy it. Were you taught how to pray as a child? If so, who taught you, and what were you instructed to do? Think about a time when you prayed in earnest. What were the circumstances surrounding that time of prayer? What did you feel when the prayer was completed? Commit to establishing a prayer routine. Pick a quiet place in your home or office. Pray at the same time each day. Start simply, dedicating just a few minutes at first. Pray in a way that works for you. If you enjoy writing, you may want to write out your prayers. You may want to pray out loud. You can pray as you walk or exercise. Consider downloading a prayer app or sign up for a daily devotional email. Find the ways that lead you to richer experiences.

Tuesday - Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy? - Philippians 4:8-9. The feelings we get when we insist on doing something we shouldn’t—gossiping, lusting, lying, stealing, cheating, etc.—usually signal the goodness in us battling the human desire to usurp God’s authority and be in charge of our own life. A rightly trained uneasy conscience is a good thing. It reminds us that we are called to live into the goodness in which God created us. Do you have areas of your life that are causing you an uneasy conscience? What are these weaknesses? Dig deeply—what is driving these temptations in your life? What steps can you put into place to combat the temptations you are facing? Every time you find yourself

leaning in to a temptation, ask yourself these questions: “What are the consequences of giving in to this weakness? Who may be hurt by this? Will the satisfaction of this moment be worth the consequences I may face?” Force yourself to answer the questions before you act.

Wednesday - Did the Bible live in me today? - John 15:1-8. The Bible is a love story—the story of a loving, creative God who is good. It is a collection of wonderfully engaging stories, written in a variety of genres such as poetry, prophecy and parables, meant not just to amuse or entertain, but to shape our very life. Engaging the Bible is about intimacy more than literacy. Reading the Bible for knowledge of God is one thing. Allowing the Bible to read you for transformation is altogether different. Wesley didn’t ask, “Did I read my Bible today?” but “Did it live in me?” Is the Bible actively shaping your heart, your inner self? To allow the Bible to live in us we must be humble people, taking a posture of listening, learning, action and service. How do you let the Bible live in you each day? The Bible reveals the human struggle, discloses all that is wrong with humanity—violence, lust, murder, injustice, paganism—and at the same time discloses God’s enduring love that overcomes human deficiencies and provides new life. Has your view of the Bible changed throughout your life? Do you value the Bible differently, or relate to it differently, than you did when you were younger? Ask for God to help hear his voice in the Bible and to open your heart and mind to the truths held in its pages.

Thursday - Did I disobey God in anything? - Deuteronomy 5:32-33, Acts 5:27-32. When we choose to obey God, we honor God’s love for us and live as God desired. When we disobey God by choosing to live our own ways, we live into our freedom, but also make the possibility of sin a reality. How do we move beyond a love for self and toward a whole-hearted love for God? When we don’t do what God intends we must choose to confess our actions or lack of actions and ask for forgiveness. Confession taps into God’s forgiveness, and forgiveness gives us a fresh start. God’s love is always greater than your biggest blunder. In what areas of my life am I choosing my own desires over God’s desires? Where can I find help in overcoming my shortcomings? In what ways do you think Jesus models for us the way God intended for humans to live? How can I worship God with the freedom God has granted me, rather than going my own way in rebellion against God? Here’s one idea: memorize the verse 1 Chronicles 29:11. When you sense a struggle within you to obey God’s authority, repeat it to yourself.

Friday - Do I pray about the money I spend? - Luke 12:13-15. Wesley famously said, “Gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.” That was why he included the question, “Do I pray about the money I spend?” To pray about the money we spend means that we go to God realizing that we do not possess any money of our own. Rather, we are simply holding God’s money for the purposes of God’s work in the world. What inner reactions did you have to Wesley’s statement, “Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can”? Which dimensions of Wesley’s guideline most surprised or challenged you? How does this approach to handling money match up with advice you get from financial publications, web sites or advisers? In what

ways does it differ? Evaluate your recent spending. How closely do your habits align with Wesley's advice? Make a three column chart: Gain, Save, Give. In each column, estimate the amounts you have gained, saved, and given in the past year. How do you believe your spending habits, as they might be reflected in next year's chart, might change if you prayed daily about the money you spent?

Saturday - Do I give time for the Bible to speak to me every day? - Hebrews 4:11-13. Wesley didn't ask this question to create more for Christians to do. He wanted us to look at our efforts to daily engage the Bible as a way for God to speak to us to shape us into more deeply committed Christians. Bible reading is not a task to be completed. It is a habitual practice to shape us and mold us into who God invites us to be. Do you struggle with finding or taking the time to read the Bible each day? As with any other good habit, start small—even five minutes a day, and let the time increase as the discipline strengthens your spiritual life. Is your challenge more with understanding and interpreting what you read? Guides like this can help guide your understanding—but you still need to reflect and pray, taking in what you understand from each Bible passage. You can find more help in understanding in a quality study Bible. If you know someone who has developed the discipline of daily Bible reading, ask them about their experiences and routine, and what helps them hear God speaking through the Bible.

The Daily Examen—St. Ignatius Loyola

1. What are the blessings in my life?
2. Where did I meet God or see God at work today?
3. What happened in my day? What did I learn? How did I feel?
4. Where did I fall short of God's will today?
5. Offer tomorrow's plans and myself to God
6. Pray for others
7. Pray the Lord's Prayer