

Discovering Our UP

A Guide for Discovering our Unique Position
through our Wesleyan Heritage
in a Post-Disaffiliated World

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Discovering our **UP**

Intro to the Wesleyan Theology of Our Church

We have a Unique Opportunity

We have a unique opportunity at this point in the life of our local church. We have recently disaffiliated from the only denomination that many of us have ever known. And we have affirmed by a written vote that we have embraced and joined a freshly anointed Methodist movement. But what does all of that mean?

We have seen throughout the process of Discernment that many in our church do not have a firm grasp of the theological tenets of the UMC BOD and of the new Transitional BOD of the GMC. And that presents us with a unique opportunity to look at the Wesleyan theological distinctives that provide for us to have a “unique position” In Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, with that in mind, let's consider the following.

Setting Christlike Priorities

Many young Christians and even some older Christians struggle with knowing what things in life should be important to them. And then keeping those that have been identified as higher priorities ahead of some that are not nearly as important.

What is a Priority?

A priority is something that is important to us, something that we care about. If something is truly important to us, then there will be obvious evidence of that priority. For instance, the Bible tells us that if our faith is truly important to us, we will demonstrate that in our works.

The Five Priorities of a Christian

Thankfully God has not left us to fend for ourselves, but he has given us his Word as a guide for our lives. Based upon God's Word, we can see that the five priorities that God gives to Christians are God, Family, Church, Country and Work. And, unless an individual is called to a life of celibacy in full time service to God, the Bible shows us that every person has been given these five areas of priority by God.

Priority # 1 – God

The Scriptures tell us plainly that serving God and his plan and design for our life should be our first priority.

Serving God comes before every other consideration in our life including ourselves, our family, our church, our employer or our country. But part of what it means to serve God is taking care of the needs our country, our employer, our church, our family and even ourselves.

Scriptural Basis

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” – Matthew 6:33 (KJV)

“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” – Matthew 10:37(KJV)

“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.” – Acts 5:29 (KJV)

Priority # 2 – Family

Unless God has called us into a life of celibacy for full time service to his Kingdom as he did the Apostle Paul and other men in the Bible, then a Christian's second priority after God becomes their family.

But who comes first in our family?

As Christians we have our spouses, our children, our siblings, our parents and our spouse's parents and siblings. These are all family members for us.

So yes family comes second only to God, but which family members come before whom?

Our spouse comes second only to God

The Bible shows us by the “leave and cleave” concept of marriage that as husbands once we are married our parents now come second to our wife. Specifically, as Christian husbands are to feed and care for the physical needs of our wives, so also are we to feed and care for our own bodies.

Scriptural Basis

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” – Genesis 2:24 (KJV)

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it...So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:” – Ephesians 5:25 & 28-29 (KJV)

Our children come after our spouses but before other family members and priorities

Remember the passage from I Timothy 5:4-8 where the Apostle Paul tells us that the first way we put our religion in practice is in our home? The needs of our children come only after our service to God and then the needs of our spouse. But the needs our children come before other priorities like our work and our local church. In truth, part of what it means to serve God is to serve the needs of our children.

Please note: All of this must be considered in light of each family's experience. If the family is a blended family and there has been abuse or neglect in the previous marriage and family situation, then a Godly mother or a Godly father may need to put the needs of an innocent child above the needs of their spouse for a season of healing and restoration of emotional and spiritual health. If this is your situation, please seek Godly counseling and Godly advice from mature Christian brothers and sisters.

As fathers we have a responsibility to care for the physical and spiritual needs of our children. In the same way that marriage is to be a model of the relationship between God and his people, so too the father/child relationship is yet another model of the relationship between our heavenly father and us as his children. We as fathers are not to discourage our children or needlessly anger them, but rather we are to bless them, exhort them, comfort them, discipline them, teach them in the ways of God and love them as God loves his children.

“A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.” – Proverbs 13:22 (KJV)

“The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.” – Proverbs 20:7 (KJV)

“Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.” – Colossians 3:21 (KJV)

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” – Ephesians 6:4 (KJV)

“As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children,” – I Thessalonians 2:11 (KJV)

We should care for the needs of our parents and other extended family

So, while the needs of our spouse and children are to come before other family obligations that does not mean we don't still care for the needs of our parents and other extended family. We simply need to seek God's guidance in where we expend our time and resources

Don't forget YOU are a part of your family

Often times in Christian circles believers are lead to believe that they can never think of their own needs. People over-commit, even to good things like family, work and church to the detriment of their own health. We need to rest. We need to see a doctor when we are sick. We need relaxation and down time for our brains to recharge so that we will be of better service in these other areas in which God calls us to serve.

If you have ever been on an airplane, they always tell you that in case of an emergency when the oxygen mask comes down put yours on first, then help those around you. The reason is that if you put on the masks of those around you first you may not be able to help them if you pass out before you can do it. This same principle applies to our lives in general. If we can't breathe, then we are of no use to anyone around us.

Priority # 3 – The Church

So up till now we have established that Biblically speaking God is our first priority and our family is our second priority. While service to God does not always equal service to the Church – sometimes it does.

God calls us to serve our families as we have just discussed. Later in this section we will discuss that God calls us to serve our employers and even the needs of our community and our country. But sometimes we can use these other God given priorities to make excuses for our neglect of the priority of service to God's Church.

Not all of us can be Pastors, Board Members or Sunday school teachers. But God wants us all to serve his local Church in some capacity. For some their service may be more financial than time based. Although this can easily become an excuse to give only money and leave the real work to others. For others who may have less to give financially (like stay at home spouses or retired folks), they can sometimes have more to give in the way of time or talents. But while we all serve God's Church in different ways, the call to serve God's Church is for every believer in Christ.

The Scriptures are clear that God wants us to make his Church and the local assembling of believers together a priority for ourselves and our families as men of God. For some of us it may be no more than bringing our families faithfully to services each week to worship God and hear the preaching and teaching of his Word and the giving of financial contributions to God's work.

For others it may go beyond that in making meals for the church or driving a church bus. For others it may be teaching a Sunday School class or leading a youth group. Some are called to be Board Members to support the Pastor and the needs of the Church building and membership. Some are called to full time Christian service as Pastors who lead the local churches of God. We all have different callings, different gifts and different amounts of time or money available. But regardless of these differences – we are all called to make the Church of God a priority in our lives.

Having established that our local church should be a priority in our lives, I want to reiterate though that our service to God is not strictly through our local church. Many Christians serve God outside of the official ministries of their local church whether it is working in homeless shelters, Christian colleges and Universities and other evangelistic programs. I consider this blog to be a ministry for God even though it is not done as an official ministry under the direction of my church.

But my point is that I do not believe it would be right for me to only serve God outside his Church while neglecting his Church. It is not an either/or proposition, it is both.

Scriptural Basis

"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.... For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the

members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ... Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." – I Corinthians 12:4-6 & 12 &27 (KJV)

"Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." – Ephesians 3:21 (KJV)

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" – Hebrews 10:23-25 (KJV)

"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." – Galatians 6:10 (KJV)

Priority #4 – Country

Despite the beliefs of some Christians, God says there is a time for war.

Scriptural Basis

"A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace." – Ecclesiastes 3:8 (KJV)

"The Lord is a man of war: the Lord is his name." – Exodus 15:3 (KJV)

"Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war." – Proverbs 20:18 (KJV)

"And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses." – Nehemiah 4:14(KJV)

Priority #5 – Work

The Bible tells us as men that we were created to be workers. Our minds and bodies as men are specifically built for work. Some of us men are built for physically based labor while others are built for more intellectually based labor. But no matter our talents and abilities – we as men are built for work. That is not intended in any way to belittle or minimize the contribution of a working spouse or a stay-at-home spouse. Each of us has a role to play. And sometimes those roles will vary with the seasons of life. There have been many wives who worked outside the home to support a husband finishing a degree or getting practical experience in a job that was not financially able to support a family.

Scriptural Basis

"And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it." – Genesis 3:15 (KJV)

"Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening." – Psalm 104:23 (KJV)

"Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion..." Ecclesiastes 3:22 (KJV)

"Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” – Ecclesiastes 9:7-10 (KJV)

“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;” – Colossians 3:23 (KJV)

“And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.” – Psalm 90:17 (KJV)

Work is not an option for a man

I know that we are all sinners and we each struggle with different sins more than others. But I that it grieves the heart of God every time a healthy able-bodied man does not want to work. This goes against the very core of a man’s design when he does not want work.

Scriptural Basis

“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” – Ephesians 4:28 (KJV)

“...but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.” – I Thessalonians 4:10-12(KJV)

Conclusion

For many men, it is not a problem of “knowing” it is a problem of “doing.” I think that these priorities are totally and completely logical once we come to Christ and someone explains these priorities to us. Our material and selfish nature may fight against these priorities and seek to expand our collection of money and stuff at the expense of all of these priorities. But, the Holy Spirit will convict our hearts and show us these priorities through God’s eyes.

Some have made the case that the word “priority” is derived from Latin and that it came into the English language in the 1400s. At its entrance into language it was singular. It meant the very first thing. It stayed singular for the next five hundred years. Only in the first half of the 1900s did we begin to see it pluralized and start contemplating multiple priorities. Some have said, we reasoned that by changing the word we could bend reality.

An equal case can be made for just the evolution of modern English language. Nevertheless, it does cause us to pause and think about whether or not we can have multiple priorities or whether or not other things flow from making our relationship with Jesus Christ our priority and trusting that He will guide us in the use of our time, talents and treasure on the other things that have importance in our lives.

Consider this. Our time on earth is shockingly brief in light of eternity. We are here for but a moment and then we must face eternity! It is utterly foolish to waste the precious gift of time that God has given to each of us doing things that do not have eternal value. Now is the time to establish our priorities and stay with them in the coming days, months, and years.

“Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16).

Christian Marriage

For the Christian couple who are married or are contemplating marriage, the marriage relationship is a covenant relationship. Covenant as defined by the Scriptures is a solemn and binding relationship which is meant to last a lifetime.

Dennis Rainey a well-known Christian family life speaker writes that "For the past two years I have had a growing concern that the Christian community has passively watched the "dumbing down" of the marriage covenant. Marriage has become little more than an upgraded social contract between two people—not a holy covenant between a man and a woman and their God for a lifetime. In the Old Testament days, a covenant was solemn and binding.

Jack Hayford writes that "The covenant of marriage is the single most important human bond that holds all of God's work on the planet together. It is no small wonder that the Lord is passionate about the sanctity of marriage and the stability of the home.

God Designed It

Marriage is God's design - One man and one woman as we read in Genesis. The covenant of marriage and the relationship between a husband and wife is used throughout the Bible to be a "picture" of other Spiritual relationships. It was used to paint a picture of God's love for his people, the people of Israel. Ad it was used many times in the New Testament to describe Jesus Christ's love for the church and was intended to show the depth of Christ's love for us and to inspire men to love their wives in the same way that Jesus Christ loved the church.

Scriptural Basis

Genesis 1:1 – In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:26 – Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness..."

Genesis 2:18 – Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper, who is suitable, adapted and complementary for him."

Although the word "covenant" is not actually used, Moses describes what is in its essence the first covenant of marriage writing:

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept. Then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. And the LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man and brought her to the man. And the man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:21-24)

Vital Truths to Remember

Remember that truths that are seldom pondered, will become truths that are soon forgotten.

Two lives become one:

In covenant you become identified with the other individual and there is a supernatural commingling of two lives.

(two becoming one flesh) "is a mystery but it is an illustration of the way Christ & the church are one." (Ephesians 5:32NLT)

In marriage, your family becomes your spouse's family, your desires your beloved's desires, and yes, even your finances are your covenant partner's finances (including credit card bills!).

There is a sign to remember which serves as a witness and a memorial:

When God entered covenant with Noah, He gave Noah the rainbow which was to be a testimony that God would remain forever faithful to keep His covenant never again to flood the earth so as to destroy all flesh.

In Genesis 9:16 the LORD God testified that:

"When the (rain) bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

When you enter covenant with your beloved, the sign is usually a ring which serves as a constant reminder (memorial) of the solemn and binding of your marriage covenant.

There is a change of name:

In Genesis 17:5 & 15 when God reaffirmed His covenant with Abram, God said"

"No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name."

As the wife takes on her husband's name, this change symbolizes the supernatural identity and oneness God intended for the partners who had entered the marriage covenant.

There is a shared meal:

Biblical covenants were often commemorated with a "covenant meal". The most famous covenant meal is found in the New Testament where we read what Jesus did on the night in which He was betrayed.

He took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which 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. (1Corinthians 11:24, 25)

You may remember celebrating your new covenant relationship by feeding each other wedding cake at your reception. This is a picture that you are now sharing a common life, that two lives have become one.

There is a covenant partner to defend:

First, take a moment to ponder (especially in light of the marriage covenant) Webster's definition of the verb to defend = To protect a person from harm or danger. To keep safe from attack. To cover. To shield. To safeguard. To shelter. To support someone in the face of an onslaught of criticism (How often do we criticize our covenant partner rather than lovingly defending them from criticism?). To repel a charge or accusation; to oppose; to protect by opposition or resistance; to support or maintain; to prevent from being injured. To fortify against danger or violence; to set obstacles to the approach of anything that can annoy.

We see this principle of defense of a covenant partner positively illustrated in the covenant David cut with Saul's son Jonathan. In this exchange we see that covenant is stronger than paternal ties (Jonathan was more committed to his covenant partner David than to his father, King Saul!) and stronger than personal ambition (Jonathan would have been next in line to be

king but willingly released that right to his covenant partner David!). This covenant relationship clearly took priority over all other relationships.

Conclusion

Marriage is not solely an issue of love. It is more than that. It is about commitment and steadfastness and a desire to draw closer to one another as we draw closer to God.

Marriages may be made in heaven, but man is responsible for the maintenance work!

Church Service and Leadership

This topic is really a topic about leadership in every situation. It forces us to ask ourselves a question.

Are you in leadership to serve or be served?

We are called to be an example. We are called to show others and influence and shepherd them, not just tell them. Christian leaders are responsible to care for God's people with faithfulness and honor, and never out of harsh or improper motivations! Jesus is our archetype and pattern for who we are and what we are to do all in love and humility. We can trust Christ to lead us; with Him, we can lead others in the same manner. Jesus calls us by first demonstrating to the Disciples to participate in and spread the kingdom of God, focusing and developing others for Him by service, example, and humility (Matt. 23; 2 Cor. 5:20).

Jesus does the extraordinary when He took a towel to wash His disciples' feet. We do the opposite when we think we are too good to serve. Jesus completely redefined what leadership and service are. He made the point that these roles are not about position or pride in the world, but rather about our position in Him. A bowl and towel would be perfect because they represent service – The Ultimate Servant, Christ, not only washed His disciple's feet, but washes the sins of the entire world by His very own blood. Christ came to serve to exemplify service. It comes from our gratitude in realizing who Christ is, what He has shown us we can do, and our opportunities and our response in gladness to those around us (Matt. 20:27-28; Luke 22:27; John 12:25-26; 13:2-5; Phil. 2:1-4).

Scriptural Basis

Matthew 23:11-12 NIV – The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Matthew 20:25-28 NIV – Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Luke 22:24-27 – A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

Philippians 2:1-8 NIV – Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death--even death on a cross!

Service is a response

Jesus is the example of Leadership and humble service. Those of us in ministry are never to look at ourselves as above others because we are not; we serve Him who serves! A leader is to lead others into the depths and precepts of Christ, and is not superior in any way.

Service is a calling

We are called to serve! Service means we are committed to serving others as Jesus called and exemplified.

Our service is a response as we look at what we do. This is not about salvation; it is about our response to God. This is about duty; it is about allowing our love for the Lord to flow into us from Him and then to others around us. Service builds and prepares us to be stronger in character and in fulfilling our responsibility for His Kingdom. Service also nurtures and strengthens us as a means of grace; as we grow, we serve. The more we serve, the more Christ-like we become. This is about using the best of what God has given to us, being obedient to Him, and serving Him. We are all called to serve, not as just pastors or Christian professionals, but as our relationship with Christ is woven into all that we do in life.

Service comes with a warning

You cannot care for God's church if you do not know how to manage your own household. Your household must come first because it is the proving ground for your ministry. Further, your household must come first because anyone who does not provide for his household is worse than an unbeliever (1 Timothy 5:8).

Conclusion

Your wife and children should never feel that they have to compete to be your top priority. Your family should see you being as ready and willing to respond to their crises, as you are to respond to the crises of other church members. Your family should know that you are as willing to work long hours for them as you are to work long hours for others. Be as willing to say no to others for the sake of your family, as you are to say no to your family for the sake of others.

And if you are looking for a few ways to be involved in ministry **WITH** your family, consider these suggestions:

- Teach Sunday school together or work in the nursery.
- Mentor a younger couple or new parents.
- Serve as church greeters, perhaps together with your children. Your kids will learn how to greet others, and those who are greeted love seeing them.
- Offer to baby-sit for couples in your church. Parents with younger children are often in desperate need of "alone time" for shopping or a date night.
- Have a few church kids over to make gifts for their parents.
- Have a cookie-baking fest with a few couples in the church, then share your baked goods.
- Offer to help a single person decorate her home for Christmas; no one wants to decorate alone.
- Teach adults and/or children your woodworking, knitting or other craft skills.
- Teach younger couples about once-a-month cooking, organizing or other practical skills. Don't forget; men like to cook, too.

- If you're mechanical or a handyman, help a single mom or older couple with car maintenance or a fix-it project.

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