



**Devotional Life in the  
Wesleyan Tradition  
Bishop Bruce R. Ough's  
Dakotas-Minnesota Area  
2014 Ash Wednesday Message**

I am Bishop Bruce Ough and I am pleased to greet you as we enter into Lent. This is a forty-day season that begins with ashes pressed upon our heads and ends with the triumphant song, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today."

As we begin this journey, it is my privilege to introduce the Dakotas Cabinet Lenten Study on the devotional life in the Wesleyan tradition.

I begin with Paul's letter to the Colossians. In the fourth chapter, Paul writes: "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with Thanksgiving. At the same time pray for us as well that God will open us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ."

These words are Paul's final instructions to the Colossians -- "devote yourselves to prayer." And, this is the call the Cabinet and I are issuing to every United Methodist in the Dakotas as we enter this season of Lent -- "devote yourselves to prayer." (Colossians 4:2-3)

The pattern of Lent was set by Jesus during his forty days of solitude, prayer and fasting in the Judean desert. This was an essential period of preparation for his public ministry. It was a time of denying his preferences for the sake of his kingdom purposes. It was a season of radical attentiveness to God. This radical attentiveness and devotion to God remains the standard for all disciples of Christ.

In the fifteenth chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus addresses his disciples about attentiveness. "Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me." (John 15:4) This is a command. Jesus did not say hang around casually and you will be fruitful. No, he makes it clear that attentiveness requires the hard work of holding oneself close. Abide in me!

As people were flocking to join the early Methodist bands and classes in England, John Wesley -- the founder of our great revival and reformation movement -- also spoke to this issue of radical attentiveness. Following the pattern and behaviors of Jesus' sojourn in the Judean wilderness, Wesley provided Methodists with a rule of life -- a set of devotional practices that he called the means of grace.

This Methodist rule of life is intended to bring an order, a discipline, a rule to our lives so that we can abide in Christ. It is intended to keep us attentive to God and the movement of God's grace in our lives. It is intended to keep us in love with God and build our capacity to love God and neighbor.

Our Methodist rule of life includes the disciplines or acts of radical attentiveness of prayer, fasting, Holy Communion, Bible study, holy conferencing and acts of mercy and grace. This is the devotional life in the Wesleyan tradition. You will learn more about these disciplines of radical attentiveness in the subsequent videos in this series.

In a letter to an early lay preacher, John Wesley wrote: "O Begin! Fix some part of everyday for private exercises....Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way: else you will be a trifler all your days....Do justice to your soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer."

As disciples of Christ we are called to a life of radical attentiveness by God's extravagant love for us and Jesus' example of denying self. I urge you to embrace this season of Lent as a time to "do justice to your soul, giving it time and means to grow." Devote yourself to prayer and all the means of grace -- so that God can open in you a door for the Word, a door to the mystery of Christ. "Do not starve yourself any longer."



***I pray for you and your congregation a most holy and blessed Lent. May the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus be yours. Amen.***