



Fresco of St. Benedict of Nursia by Fra Angelico, 1441, Florence

Greetings!

So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. -Ephesians 4:25-5:2

For a season, a friend of mine was a Trappist Monk at [Gethsemani Abbey](#) in Trappist, KY. Trappists or Cistercian Monks are a specialized Benedictine Order who follow the teachings of Saint Benedict of Nursia. Nursia is a small city in central Italy. At the time it was in the region known as Umbria. As Protestants most of us do not have experience with people in the religious vocations of the Roman Catholic Church. A trip to Gethsemani is under two hours from Cincinnati and is a place to experience a unique and very spiritual culture that could potentially have a lasting impact on your life.

Dr. Mary Ewing Stamps is a fellow seminary student of mine who wanted such an experience. Following graduation from Emory University in the '90s, she founded an order: the Order of St. Brigid of Kildare, Benedictine–Methodist Monastery in St. Joseph,



MN. It is a special monastery founded for men and women, married and single, as a United Methodist monastic order. You can read about Mary and the work of the Order by clicking [here](#). The Rule of St. Benedict is the common practice in their work and their witness to the world. Benedict has had a huge impact upon the Christian world and world history itself. Read more about St. Benedict by clicking [here](#).

Why talk about this? Because Protestants have rules, too, and we find them in the scriptures. Think about the Sermon on the Mount as some of the “rules of life” for Jesus. Or the going away to a “quiet place” or the frequency of visits to Temple and Synagogue. John Wesley ordered his life with spiritual practices known as the Means of Grace. The Means have two areas of focus: Works of Mercy and Works of Piety. As a United Methodist you should know them and be practicing them! In fact, the General Rules of the United Methodist Church are rules of life: ***Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God.***

Likewise, [*The Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition*](#) is a rule of life. A further dive in the life of John Wesley shows that he was very interested in the dedicated life of the early desert mothers and fathers. They are the founders of the monastic movement that spread across Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Their work on discipline and purposeful living is inspiring. Today’s text gives us a rule for living. It is a first century rule of life. Really, the book of Ephesians is about faithful living in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The whole book of Ephesians is a Rule of Life.

Rules of life are possibilities that only life immersed in the Spirit sent by Jesus can bring. So as you consider the text think how your life can be transformed from an ***old creation*** into a ***new creation*** that is not focused on oneself, but on others first. And if you think the transformation from old to new creation is a one and done, think again. We are always being transformed.

I want to leave you with *The Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition*. This prayer is a way for us to connect with the text from Ephesians, our brothers and sisters in the religious orders, and to our founder the Rev. John Wesley.

Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition

"I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

Peace,



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