

The Well of Living Water: *Part One*

Light + Life Group Conversation and Study Guide

Based on *Life-Giving Holiness* by Bishop Linda Adams
in Light + Life Magazine, February 2021



Part One: What is Holiness?

This is the first study guide in a series of four. Be sure to download [part two](#), [part three](#) and [part four](#).

“Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.”

(1 Peter 1:13–17)

Let’s begin with this question for discussion: What does it mean to be set apart to God?

Life-Giving Holiness is the first of five values from *The Free Methodist Way*. These values are not merely statements with which we might agree, but rather a **way** for us to live. With that in mind, let’s consider how we might live as holy people — set apart to God in all we do and say.

Bishop Linda Adams has written an article to guide us. Take time to read, re-read, ponder, and engage with each point.

Life-Giving Holiness

By Linda J. Adams

After a communion service at New Hope Church in Rochester, New York, a spunky 6-year-old girl made a beeline for the kitchen. As the leftover communion cups were being emptied, she asked to drink some of the juice. Given the go-ahead, she exclaimed, “I need all the holiness I can get!”

Her novel idea that a few ounces of grape juice would boost her holiness may not be much more of a misunderstanding than some adults’ ideas. Expressing her need in the language of holiness makes her seem like an old-fashioned Free Methodist, since we don’t often use the term anymore.

The doctrine of entire sanctification was a hill the first Free Methodists were willing to die on. Benjamin Titus (B.T.) Roberts, our principal founder, embodied John Wesley’s desire to recover New Testament Christianity, summarized by the mandate to “raise up a holy people.” Free Methodists determined to be holy. Like John and Charles Wesley, from whose theology and hymns they gained much of their inspiration, early Free Methodists were sometimes misunderstood, mocked and maligned for their insistence that God both expects and empowers an all-encompassing holiness in the life of the believer.

Have you ever felt like that 6-year-old who said, “I need all the holiness I can get!”? Why? What do you “run to” believing that it will make you more holy – more like Jesus?

Bishop Linda points out our “doctrine of entire sanctification.” Is this term new to you?

Whether on your own or in a group, grab your smart phone or computer and look up these three words and write their definitions:

1. Doctrine:
2. Entire:
3. Sanctification (see also Sanctity, Sanctus, Sanctified):

Now, write a longhand, expanded version of the “doctrine of entire sanctification” using the definitions. Write it here:

How does this definition change, enhance or clarify any thoughts you’ve had concerning holiness?

The Free Methodist Way begins with *Life-Giving Holiness* because to our forebears, a radical transformation of heart and mind resulting in fully loving God and neighbor was considered the birthright of the child of God. For us as a movement to abandon holiness as a defining value would be as foolish as

Esau throwing away his birthright for a bowl of stew (see Genesis 25:19–34). God wants 21st century Free Methodists to believe in and experience the Holy Spirit's presence that makes us more like Jesus from the inside out. To be made holy brings freedom and life. This is our message!

Consider Bishop Linda's words: radical – transformation – heart – mind – love – experience – Holy Spirit's presence – freedom – life. Which word(s) impact you most and why?

The legacy we've been handed as Free Methodists is that holiness was considered the "birthright of the child of God." What is a birthright and how do you connect this to Scriptural holiness?

Let's Pray:

Lord God, we want to be holy as You are holy. We pray that You would teach us as we look into Your Word. Guide us into truth and change us. We simply and humbly declare that we do not want to be people marked by sin and the ways of the world. We want Your holy ways to be our ways. Teach us Your ways.

In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

The Well of Living Water: *Part Two*

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Part Two: An Outside-In Approach

This is the second study guide in a series of four. Be sure to download [part one](#), [part three](#) and [part four](#).

*For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.
(Romans 3:28)*

In our last session we discussed what it means to be holy as God is holy. Now we will look at the *law* and why it is not effective in bringing about holiness in our lives. Let's pick up where we left off in Bishop

The Letter Kills

At the outset, we need to admit that those of us who have been in this denominational family for many years have at times seen a pursuit of holiness that was not life-giving. If we picture the *Highway of Holiness* winding through varied terrain with generations of Free Methodists traveling along it, describing it and teaching others about it, we'll notice some veering off into the *Ditch of Legalism*. (Other movements have steered off-course into the opposite ditch of either License or Liberalism, but that hasn't been our error.)

Following John Wesley's "General Rules for Christian Conduct" and adding a rule against buying, selling or holding of a human being as a slave, the first Free Methodists adopted rules for holy living. Definition brings clarity and objectivity, they reasoned, so sinful

actions and attitudes were forbidden, and behaviors of holy living were defined and required. For instance, the rules forbade the use of tobacco, opiates and alcohol, worldly amusements, membership in oath-bound lodges, and profane language and evil speaking. They required plain dress, business integrity, and careful observance of the Lord's Day in addition to classical expressions of Christian devotion such as attendance at worship, prayer, Scripture reading and tithing. Relational accountability structures were created to aid new believers and seasoned saints alike in living the life of holiness as defined in these terms.

One of the problems with a rules-based approach is that rules and prohibitions multiply. As with the Pharisees in Jesus' day, principled motivations get lost in the proliferation of laws. As an example from

our past, I enjoy reading historical accounts of 19th century female preachers. One pioneering evangelist's personal account told tales of courageous witness in taverns and brothels resulting in dramatic conversions, but then delved into her agony over the rule against decorative collars and buttons on women's blouses. She so longed to be holy, to surrender fully to the Lord, to consecrate her whole self to God's work — but she struggled mightily with guilt over wishing she didn't have to alter her blouses to make them plain!

Eventually, we incorporated a balancing scriptural truth. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant — not of the letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills,

but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection brought salvation by grace through faith, as Paul proclaimed in Ephesians 2:8–9, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast." And, from his letter to the Galatians, "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?" (Galatians 3:2b-3). Over the course of several decades, we have tried to reorient our path out of the ditch of Legalism to aim for the gracious center of the *Highway of Holiness*.

What is the difference between *rules and a rules-based approach*? Name some rules we all live by every day. Name some rules that are helpful and create a way of life for us all that provide life-giving boundaries.

Consider Bishop Linda's statement, "One of the problems with a rules-based approach is that rules and prohibitions multiply." Talk about ways you've seen rules and prohibitions multiply in our society. Why do rules give way to more rules?

Why do you think people are enticed to break rules?

Go all the way back to the Garden of Eden (read Genesis 2:15–17). God sets forth one rule — a "don't do this" statement. What is it? What goes wrong? Why do you think things went so wrong so fast?

All rules begin with a reason in mind. Here's a classic example: Are you allowed to be noisy and disruptive in a library? Have you ever been asked to leave a library because you were noisy? Can you envision a librarian with their finger over their mouth sounding out an indignant "Shhhhhhh"?

Why? Why is that rule in place?

What becomes of a library when it's a noisy environment?

When we forget the reason for a rule — simply obeying it “because” — it becomes *legalism*. What rules exist in your church about which you're not sure why those rules are in place?

Bishop Linda describes legalism as a *ditch*. Do you agree? Why or why not?

A rules-based approach to holiness is an outside-in approach. Praise God that there is an alternative. In fact, His design has always been an inside-out approach. In our next session, we'll drink from a well of Living Water.

Let's Pray:

Lord God, help us to forsake legalism. We know that rules are helpful in their place, but in the end, You and You alone give life! We want that life — that Living Water! In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

The Well of Living Water: *Part Three*

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Part Three: An Inside-Out Approach

This is the third study guide in a series of four. Be sure to download [part one](#), [part two](#) and [part four](#).

Having discussed what holiness is and the ineffectiveness of legalism as a poor substitute for true holiness, we now turn to some words from the FM Articles of Religion and encouragement from Bishop Linda Adams.

The Constitution in our [2019 Book of Discipline](#) declares this Article of Religion:

¶119 Sanctification is that saving work of God beginning with new life in Christ whereby the Holy Spirit renews His people after the likeness of God, changing them through crisis and process, from one degree of glory to another, and conforming them to the image of Christ.

As believers surrender to God in faith and die to self through full consecration, the Holy Spirit fills them with love and purifies them from sin. This sanctifying relationship with God remedies the divided mind, redirects the heart to God, and empowers believers to please and serve God in their daily lives.

Thus, God sets His people free to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love their neighbor as themselves.

Notice that sanctification — that is, being made holy — is part of the saving work of God. This gracious action of God begins with new life in Christ, as the Holy Spirit works in the life of the believer to make us more like God through both crisis and process. In other words, Free Methodists have officially stopped fighting the *either/or* battle between instantaneous or gradual transformation into the image of Christ. We affirm the *both/and* of a life surrendered to God, dead to self through full consecration, and filled with the Holy Spirit — a lifelong relationship that normally involves crisis opportunities for accelerated growth along the way.

Saints (the Bible's term for all who are made holy in Christ) can attest to moments of conviction of sin, repentance, and surrender to God's refining work. Some can testify to dramatic and instantaneous deliverance from harmful addictions, sinful attitudes, or a self-centered orientation. In a moment, they sensed the power of God cleansing and filling them,

and they were forever changed. For some, crisis experiences are like the starter's gun in the marathon of life in the Holy Spirit. For others, the journey of faith may be less punctuated with highs and lows, but it is marked by steady progress and growth in grace.

Notice the fruit of the life of holiness described in this Article of Religion: We are filled with love and purified from sin. God remedies the divided mind, redirects the heart, and empowers believers to please and serve God in their daily lives. Sanctified people are set free to love God with our entire being and to love our neighbors as ourselves. How life-giving!

The New Testament expresses the evidence of the Spirit's presence both in terms of fruit (Galatians 5:22–23) and gifts (e.g., 1 Corinthians 12:7–11). We affirm the reality and necessity of both, and long for our churches to be alive to the Spirit so that both are clearly evident. As experienced in the book of Acts and taught throughout the New Testament, God's Spirit has been poured out so that believers can experience His supernatural presence. Spirit-filled believers receive power for worship, witness, proclamation, prayer and service, sometimes accompanied by miracles. Both the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit are given to manifest the glory of God.

Fruit and Gifts of the Spirit!

In the last paragraph of this section, Bishop Linda calls our attention to the “reality and necessity of both” gifts and fruit of the Spirit. What gifts of the Spirit do you see at work in the life of your church? Which are lacking?

In the same way, which fruit of the Spirit is plentiful in your church and which are lacking?

What tends to be the view of the more miraculous gifts of the Spirit (e.g. healing, miracles, signs, prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues, words of knowledge, words of wisdom) in your church? Discuss their necessity in the local church.

Some people tend to view the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) as the height that exceeds any gift. Do you hold to this view? Why or why not? Does Scripture hold to such a view? Why or why not?

Crisis and Process? What is that?

Did you catch those two words – *crisis and process*. What could these two words possibly have to do with holiness? Take a moment and discuss it with your group. What is the connection?

Let's take time to examine four moments of “crisis” that happened in the Scriptures. Look up each passage and describe, in your own words, what the crisis moment is and what changed in the lives of the people who encountered God.

1. Moses meets God (Exodus 3:1–20):

2. Isaiah sees God (Isaiah 6:1–7):

3. Zacchaeus meets Jesus (Luke 19:1–10)

4. Paul encounters Jesus (Acts 9:1–9)

No doubt these are extraordinary examples of spiritual crisis moments. How does that apply to us today? Can you identify a moment in your own life that can only be described as a spiritual crisis? How did you emerge from that moment changed by the transforming power of the Spirit?

As we consider the idea of *process*, let's hear more from Bishop Linda. Be on the lookout for further descriptions of *crises that lead to holiness*, as well as *the process of holiness*. Highlight or underline key words and phrases that jump out to you.

Grace for the Whole Journey

Wesleyan theology has been called an optimistic theology. Why? Because we believe in the possibilities of grace to radically change human hearts and lives this side of the grave. God has designed and provided for every step of the transforming journey, as the Holy Spirit interacts with people of free will, graciously leading us along the path until we see God face to face.

We affirm John Wesley's *Ordo Salutis*, or *Way of Salvation*. Wesley taught that God first works in all people through *Prevenient Grace*, preparing hearts to open to God. God's *Convicting Grace* makes us aware of our sin and willing to accept God's remedy. *Justifying Grace* puts us into saving relationship with God through faith in the finished work of Christ; we are converted and assured that we are God's beloved child. John Wesley said of the next phase in the outworking of God's grace, *Sanctifying Grace*, "It is perhaps for this reason that God has raised up the Methodists." God not only desires to make us holy but accomplishes holiness in us as we respond; the evidence of this holiness is pervasive love. Finally, through *Glorifying Grace*, at the moment of death God transforms us into immortality, and we are taken up into the life of God.

One night many years ago, I sat on a rooftop with a Calvinist friend and tussled over theology until the sun came up. I'll never forget his astonishment that I do not share his conviction that we "sin every day in thought, word and deed" and are condemned to repeat that until the day we die. He couldn't fathom the depths of grace that we Wesleyans experience and proclaim. The term "entire sanctification" particularly

tripped him up. Many others have stumbled over that phrase, a bedrock of Wesleyan and Free Methodist theology. My friend and I paged through our Bibles and painted contrasting pictures of the possibilities of holiness in the life of the believer.

Here are a few of the many Scriptures on which our beliefs are based (see Chapter 3, "The Christian Journey," in the [Book of Discipline](#), particularly ¶13108, Sanctification, for more of our biblical foundation):

"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15–16, quoting three occurrences in Leviticus).

"May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this" (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 NRSV).

"Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14).

"Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Words like "entire" and "perfecting" may sound like a claim of immunity from sin or flaws. Wesley and Roberts often clarified that the reality to be experienced is pure motives from a loving heart. Human beings never outgrow the possibility of giving into temptation or exercising errors in judgment, but a life centered in the God who is Love can radiate love, which is the essence of holiness. +

Which words or phrases did you note as meaningful or enlightening? Talk about why they caught your attention. What did they say to you or how did they expand your understanding of holiness?

What questions arose as you read? Is there anything you'd like further clarification on? Talk about those things.

Here are three key points to explore together as a group:

- 1. Optimistic theology for the whole journey of your life.** Bishop Linda points out that “we believe in the possibilities of grace to radically change human hearts and lives this side of the grave.” How well acquainted are you with the possibilities of sin and temptation? What would it be like to lean into the optimism of knowing the possibilities of grace and holiness?
- 2. Sanctifying grace accomplishes holiness in us as we respond.** Do you tend to share the opinion of some that when your errors surface you say, “God made me that way”? Did He? Really? What if His purpose is to do a work of grace from the inside out that changes you completely — in an “all things new” kind of way? What role do our responses to God play in this?
- 3. Center on God who is Love.** We’ve learned in the previous study that a rules-based approach to holiness doesn’t work. Part of the reason is that we focus on *compliance* and know that we will slip up at some point. It leaves us feeling inadequate and a disappointment to God. How do things change when we focus on God? Do you tend to see God’s judgment or love; help or expectations; demands or encouragement? How does holiness become a thing of joy as we focus on the love, help and encouragement of God?

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Holiness happens in *burning bush* moments like that of Moses, and it happens in the day-to-day journey of life — the monumental and the mundane — using everything in our lives to make us more into the image of Christ. Because of the potential in the power of God, and our response of dying to ourselves so He can do a work in us from the inside out, holiness is *entirely* possible.

Let's pray.

Lord God, we bow before You and thank You for calling us to be holy. We ask that You use both moments of crisis and process to make us holy as You are holy. We will do our part — dying to self. Help us to know more and more what that means. We invite you to speak to us — guide us and lead us — reveal to us our roadblocks to surrender and bring us into the full reality of the potential found in your grace.

We pray in Jesus' powerful name. Amen.

The Well of Living Water: *Part Four*

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Part Four: Who is Holiness For?

This is the fourth study guide in a series of four. Be sure to download [part one](#), [part two](#), and [part three](#).

Let's begin with this story from Scripture.

"Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John — although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

(John 4:1-14)

If you knew...

This story may be new to you, or you may have read it hundreds of times. Regardless of your familiarity with the story, the most amazing statement is made by Jesus in the middle of His conversation with this woman at the well. Remembering that we're talking about holiness — a reality that may seem distant or unattainable to you — put yourself in the place of the woman and hear Jesus say:

“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”

If you knew the Gift of God.

Is living a holy life a matter of your own ability to “pull it off”? How would you respond if Jesus were here in person with you right now and said to you, “If you knew the gift of God...”? What would you say to Him?

...And who...

Have you ever been in presence of someone great and did not know it? How did your actions, words and/or mannerisms change once you knew? Do you *know* that Jesus can impart holiness to you? Do you question His ability? Why or why not?

A spring of living water welling up to eternal life.

For whose benefit is holiness? Yours alone, or for someone else too? How does holiness help everyone in my sphere of influence?

As we ponder these questions, let's read the final segment from Bishop Linda's article, *Life-Giving*

No Holiness but Social Holiness

The horizontal dimension of this love extends not only to family and friends, people we often refer to as “loved ones,” but to all. Jesus explained: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43–48).

The Greek word used for “perfect” in this passage carries the meaning of “complete” and “mature.” Our love should not be exclusive, lacking completeness. God invites us into His own limitless love. This is the “perfect love” that “casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).

John Wesley famously wrote in his 1739 preface to [“Hymns and Sacred Poems.”](#) “‘Holy Solitaries’ is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than Holy Adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. ‘Faith working by love’ is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.” Our love is meaningless if not expressed in kindness, mutual care for one another's souls and bodies, and acts of compassion for the poor, the suffering, the marginalized and others for whom Christ died. The context of Wesley's statement here primarily refers to the fact that the spiritual journey is a communal path; our growth in grace is greatly enhanced by social dimensions. As we worship together, pray with one another, confess to each other and forgive one another, we experience “faith working by love.” The witness of his life, however, shows his commitment extending to societal issues such as abolitionism and community transformation as the outworking of holiness. +

Holiness.

What does it mean that God's holy love — imparted to you — has a *horizontal dimension*?

Bishop Linda says “our love is meaningless if not expressed...” Name and discuss outward expressions of holiness. Who are they for and how do they impact those people?

“Social holiness” is a term from John Wesley that some have conflated today to mean the world's definition of social justice. Holiness will certainly embody biblical justice, but many people who do not know Jesus engage in acts of social justice every day. How is holiness different? Perhaps the image of the poor and oppressed drinking from a holy well is an helpful image.

Have you heard the term “social holiness” before? How have you interpreted it? How would you describe it?

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3–5. How are holy people supposed to “fight” against injustice?

In Closing...

As we conclude this series of four studies, take a moment to reflect on how you've been challenged or encouraged.

What has been your biggest “aha” moment?

What questions remain that you'd like to have more conversations about?

What will you do with what you've learned?

Let's pray.

Lord God, we see You for who You are and acknowledge that You are more powerful than temptation and sin. We are grateful for Your love that wants the very best for us and offers us living water so that not only will we be satisfied, but we can share Your life-giving holiness with others who are “thirsty.” We pray that our lives would become living, breathing, walking wells of Your holiness to the benefit of all who are in our spheres of influence.

For Your glory alone, Lord Jesus, and in Your holy name. Amen.