

# On Your Marks!

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We live in a very experience-oriented time in history. We are rightly drawn to those people, places, and things that have what J. B. Phillips called “the ring of truth”—a mark of authenticity and relevance. In a world where words are cheap and character is counterfeited, we want to be assured we are giving ourselves to something real. When we see it, we are willing to invest in it, and we usually do so through some kind of deeply meaningful experience. But it doesn’t take us long to discover something more is needed to sustain the original encounter. In fact, we usually learn that we can’t sustain all the ways we felt at the beginning, because some experiences were not meant to last forever. Instead, we must move into a more intentional life that nourishes and expresses what first got us started.

John Wesley found himself in a similar place and time. Between 1733 and 1738, he was overseeing a growing number of Christians who wanted to live their lives according to the gospel and do so in ways that held them accountable to each other. By 1742, this collection of people became an identifiable movement within the larger Christian church. Anglicans, Quakers, Puritans, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and nondenominational Christians turned to him for spiritual guidance.

Some of this movement occurred outside of London and beyond Wesley’s ability to oversee everything taking place. In anticipation of what would soon become the Annual Conference—the yearly gathering of leaders who prayed to discern what they were supposed to believe, teach, and do—Wesley wrote the foundational document called *The Character of a Methodist*, to provide the sustaining strength for what Methodism would become. His original document remains a gift to us today. In it Wesley gives us five marks to confirm our identity as genuine and fruitful disciples and followers of Christ:

The following character-building study questions are found in brief form after each chapter of the book as “Markers.” This guide can stimulate reflection and discussion in a group, a congregation, or in a conference that aims to bear the fruit of a living faith.

**I. A Methodist Loves God**

- 1) In your spiritual formation, which of the two commandments (love God; love others) is currently calling for greater attention? Why?
- 2) How have you found the love of God to be the orienting center for your discipleship?
- 3) Consider how new birth is where discipleship begins, not ends. How have you found this to be so?

**II. A Methodist Rejoices in God**

- 1) Reflect on the phrase “discipleship is a whole-life response to grace.” What two or three thoughts come to your mind?
- 2) Respond to the statement, “Joy is the mark of discipleship that gives us courage and confidence.”
- 3) Why do you believe that reconciliation with God is crucial in giving our joy its proper meaning?

**III. A Methodist Gives Thanks**

- 1) Where have you found it challenging to give thanks?
- 2) What is your dominant concept of God? How has it helped shape your discipleship?
- 3) Where do thanksgiving and prayer currently intersect in your life?

**IV. A Methodist Prays Constantly**

- 1) How does the idea of prayer as a response to God affect the way you pray?
- 2) Have you made use of liturgical prayer? If so, how have you found it to be helpful in your prayer life?
- 3) What does “pray without ceasing” mean to you, and how do you attempt to put the admonition into practice?

**V. A Methodist Loves Others**

- 1) God loves you “in order that” \_\_\_\_\_?
- 2) Can you hit a target without aiming? Can you be a fruitful disciple by acting on hunches or impulses?
- 3) Where do your discipleship and your vocation currently intersect?