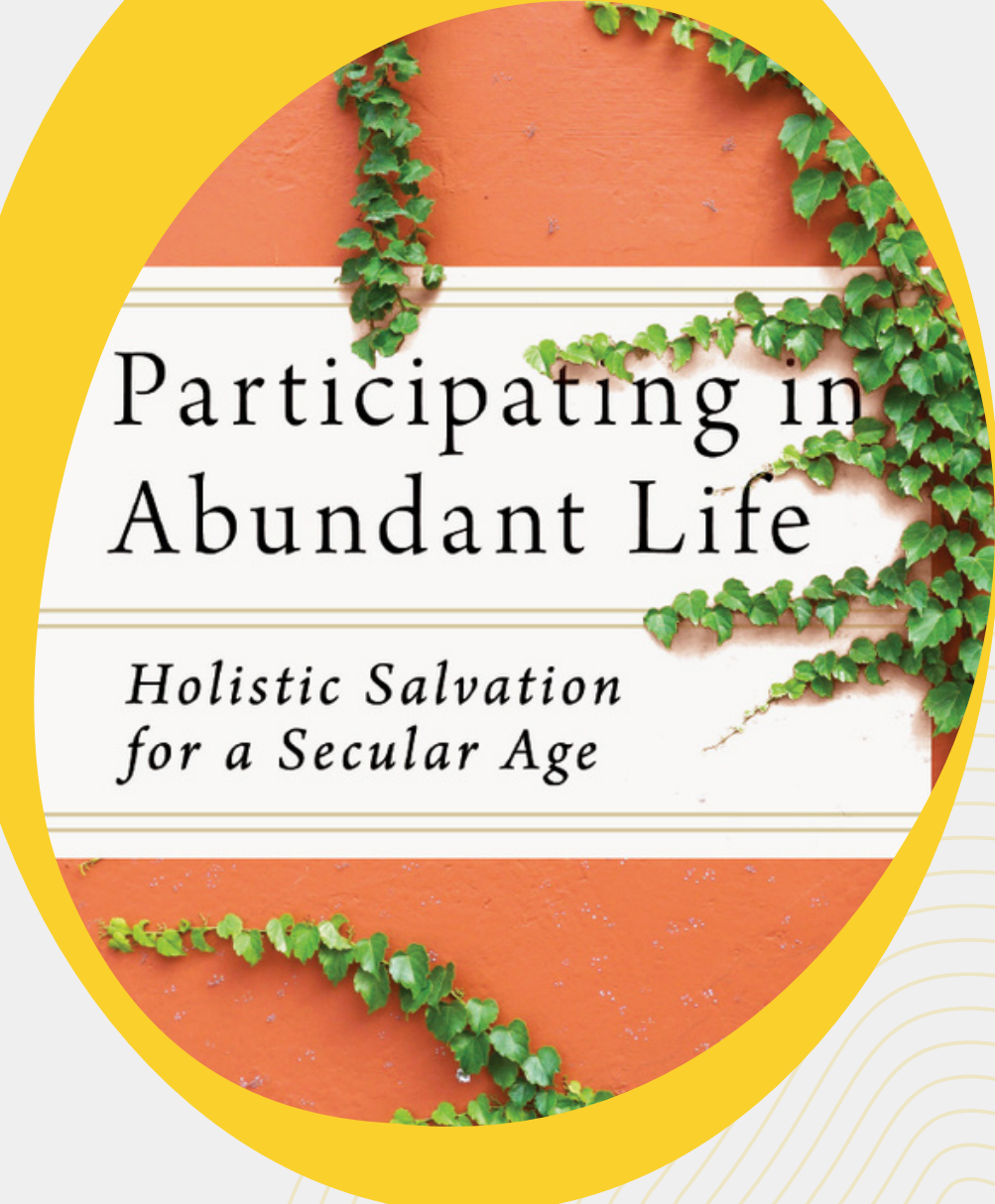




Participating in Abundant Life

*Holistic Salvation
for a Secular Age*

Study Guide

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MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH A
GRANT FROM:

The FOUNDATION *for*
EVANGELISM

A Catalyst to Equip Disciples to Share the Good News

About this Study Guide

Participating in Abundant Life invites individuals and congregations to reimagine ways that ministries and our daily lives can both explain and demonstrate how holistically God wants to offer salvation and bless us, both now and into eternity. Through the development of metrics in the categories of standard of living, quality of life, and eternal life, you are invited to set tangible, measurable goals directly related to the discipleship formation and community transformation.

This study guide offers a combination of bible study and practical questions to get your leadership team started approaching ministry with this new lens. We pray that you find this work helpful in expanding imaginations and designing ministries and programs in a way that facilitates transformation.

The FOUNDATION *for* EVANGELISM

A Catalyst to Equip Disciples to Share the Good News

This resource was made possible by a grant from The Foundation for Evangelism, a Wesleyan-tradition foundation devoted to creating disciples so changed by their relationship with Jesus Christ that they cannot stop themselves from serving as Christ served, or sharing "Why Jesus" in all aspects of their lives.

Through the generosity of its donors, and in keeping with the doctrine, discipline, and spirit of John and Charles Wesley, The Foundation for Evangelism endows and invests resources so that funds will forever be used to invite all people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. To learn more visit FoundationForEvangelism.org.

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INTRODUCTION & CHAPTER 1 - COMMON GOOD

Discussion Questions

1. How do you define salvation?
2. What are your initial thoughts about reframing salvation to “participating in abundant life?”
3. Salvation is often thought of as a one-time event or the end of a journey. As Wesleyan Christians, we affirm that God’s grace is present throughout our lives and salvation is ongoing process of growth.

Is this the common understanding in your congregation?

4. The Parable of the Good Shepherd introduces the term “abundant life” and that the shepherd attends to all the sheep’s needs. With this care comes the expectation that the sheep will both graciously receive the shepherd’s care *and* share what they have received with others. The combination is both receiving and giving is what it means to *participate* in abundant life.

How does your congregation invite everyone to identify and share their gifts and resources?

5. Does your congregation do anything that would be accepted by those outside the church as “working toward the common good?”
6. Can your congregation explain why they work toward the common good as a way of participating in God’s mission, not just because it seems like a nice thing to do?
7. Does your church invite and include people from the wider community to participate in its missional work, especially when it involves working toward the common good?

CHAPTER 2 - EXPERIENCING SALVATION

Discussion Questions

1. Teasdale gives examples of how three theological traditions understand how God works through Jesus to provide salvation.

How does your understanding compare to the Wesleyan/Arminian tradition?

2. Salvation is often presented as being saved from something terrible.

What if salvation was understood as a reorientation that invites us to join God's mission?

What difference does it make to be "saved for" a purpose as opposed to being just "saved from" a future destination?

3. Think through events your congregation holds that the general public is welcome to attend (such as worship, Bible studies, holiday events).

What are some of the most common words, phrases, and concepts used that would not make sense to someone outside of the Christian faith and/or your specific congregation?

Could you explain what those words or phrases mean if someone asked you about them?

Do we mistakenly assume people understand the meaning of our words and concepts - does our "churchy" language create barriers? Discuss.

CHAPTER 3 - BIBLE STUDY

Read each of these biblical descriptions or accounts of salvation:

- Isaiah 11:6-9
- Psalm 23
- Matthew 6:31-33
- Acts 11:1-18

Discussion Questions

1. How is salvation described in each passage?

Isaiah 11:6-9	
Psalm 23	
Matthew 6:31-33	
Acts 11:1-18	

2. Would you have used these passages to describe salvation before reading this?
Why or why not?

3. How is your understanding of salvation challenged, expanded, or reinforced?

CHAPTER 4 - STANDARD OF LIVING

Discussion Questions

1. Read Matthew 25:31-46. In this passage, Jesus explains that God will judge how we care for others. This means that our salvation is not just a matter of personal belief, but of public action. (This ties into the idea that we don't just receive abundant life but participate in it.)

Given this clear teaching of Jesus, why do you think being and Christian and being "saved" is so often seen as just a matter of what we believe as individuals?

2. Have you ever thought about serving others, including sharing your gifts and resources with them, as part of your stewardship?

In the United Methodist Church, members promise to support the ministries of the church by prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.

Which aspect of this promise stretches you or is the most challenging?

3. Consider the quote from John Wesley's sermon, "The Use of Money," found on page 103.

How is sharing our resources specifically to improve the poor's standard of living part of our salvation and experience of abundant life?

4. What makes the good done through your church different than other civic organizations engaged in similar activities?
5. Does your congregation explicitly offer theological grounding for missional efforts and help its members articulate this as part of their faith formation?

CHAPTER 5 - SAVING HAPPINESS

*Standard of living refers to a person's capacity to consume.
Quality of life points to the level of well-being a person feels.*

Discussion Questions

1. We tend to plan outreach and missional activities around meeting physical needs.

How does your church seek to address social and emotional needs, as well?

If you are in a higher-income community, do you recognize needs in your immediate community or do you travel to meet the physical needs of people who do not reside near your church?

2. Loneliness is more than feeling sad and can have physical and psychological effects.

How does your church help people find and build community and belonging?

3. Consider question #2 related to specific populations, such as among seniors, young families, singles, and teens.

Are there ways the church not only reaches out to these populations but specifically listens to them to recognize what sort of mental and emotional health issues they need a community to address?

4. We usually focus on the ways that Jesus improved people's standard of life through his miracles, but many of the miracles also improved people's quality of life. Read Mark 5:24-34.

What would have changed for the woman in addition to her body being healed?

5. Read John 4:1-42.

How does Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well address quality of life, challenge social norms, and foster community?

CHAPTER 6- ETERNAL LIFE

Discussion Questions

1. Read or recite John 3:16.

How is this verse typically used and understood by your congregation regarding evangelism?

2. Individual congregations often are more comfortable with one facet of abundant life. There might be a focus on helping others (improving their standard of living and/or quality of life) or saving souls (eternal life). It is rare that congregations bring all three together in a way that invites both their members and the people they serve to participate in abundant life.

Does your congregation have a leaning or preference toward one of the aspects of abundant life?

3. Lesslie Newbegin and E. Stanley Jones encouraged Christians to work for the common good alongside secular agencies and organizations while still holding to Jesus as their central example and motivation.

Does your congregation partner with other community organizations, or are there groups in your area that could make a greater impact through partnerships, instead of practicing duplication or reinventing the wheel?

How could you see partnering with these organizations as a way of both providing a Christian witness to the people you were serving and to the members of the other organization?

FINAL PROCESSING

Discussion Questions

1. Does your congregation currently have ministries that address all three aspects of abundant life: Standard of Living, Quality of Life, and Eternal Life?

Which of these ministries are considered the strengths of the congregation?

Which are not seen as strong?

2. ***Are there ways existing ministries could offer abundant life more?***

This could include doing things like partnering across ministries, providing ways for people both to receive and to share the gifts of God, or developing a clear churchwide theology of abundant life that could be shared with all ministry participants so they can explain how their work is part of God's mission.

3. Is there currently an intentional process for planning and assessing ministry effectiveness?
4. How might assessing ministries with the framework of the three aspects of abundant life change or strengthen your fruitfulness?

(Im)Proving Your Ministry's Effectiveness

Rev. Dr. Heather Lear & Rev. Dr. Mark Teasdale

You've got an innovative ministry idea and the passion to make it happen, but can you convince others it will be effective? Whether inviting people to come to faith, discipling Christians, or launching a new program, you need clear measurements to tell your story and show the impact God is making through you. These are essential to apply for grants, but also to make a case to anyone for how impactful your ministry is regardless of if they share your faith commitments or even use the same vocabulary you do.

Rules for applying for grants and sharing about your ministry meaningfully outside your usual group:

1. Follow the Directions and Answer the Questions!
 - If you want to prove to people that what you're doing has value, you need to express that in the way that makes sense to them—using their language and concepts.
2. Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Your Ministry
 - You need clear measurements that show change over time as a result of your work. This requires tracking multiple items related to transformation.

Impact	The ultimate transformation you envision making with your ministry
Inputs	The resources gathered to make the impact
Throughputs	The activities engaged in to use the resources toward making the impact
Outputs	The immediate results of the activities
Outcomes	The effect of the activities on the character of the people involved

3. Your Measurements Should Link to How You Participate in God's Mission
 - A clear and holistic understanding of salvation is critical to this.

If we think of our work as inviting people to participate in the abundant life of Christ, we can further clarify the specific impacts we want to make by envisioning the different facets of abundant life that our ministries will accomplish.

Standard of Living	Ministries that improve the ability of people to flourish physically
Quality of Life	Ministries that improve the ability of people to flourish mentally, emotionally, and relationally
Eternal Life	Ministries that invite people to respond to the message of the forgiveness of sins and the hope of glory



Applying This to My Ministry

Ministry/Activity:

What Abundant Life impact(s) do I want to make?

Standard of Living:

Quality of Life:

Eternal Life:

What Measurements do I need to prove I am making this impact?

Inputs/Needed Resources:

Throughputs/Activities:

Outputs/Immediate Results:

Outcomes/Changes in Individuals, Congregation, Community:



Fully developed examples of score cards are available at:
<https://markteasdale.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Metrics-For-Salvation-Forms-IVP.pdf>