Here are the seven Wesley questions on which we will focus this week:

**Sunday** - Do I thank God that I am not like others?
**Monday** - Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
**Tuesday** - Do I confidentially pass on to others what was told to me in confidence?
**Wednesday** - Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy, or distrustful?
**Thursday** - Am I honest in all my actions and words or do I exaggerate?
**Friday** - Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold resentment toward or disregard?
**Saturday** - When did I last speak to someone about my faith?

To receive each day’s question, with a Scripture reading and reflection questions in the Grow-Pray-Study Guide (GPS) via e-mail each morning, go to www.cor.org/gps, and you’ll find a link to sign up. If you prefer, you can use the GPS app—search the Apple or Google app stores for “Resurrection GPS.”

From Pastor Hamilton’s sermon:

The first of Wesley’s questions that we consider is, “Do I thank God that I am not like others?” The wording comes from Jesus’ Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18….What was going on in the heart of the Pharisee in the parable who prayed, “I thank you, God, that I am not like that sinner?” Luke introduced the parable in chapter 18 this way: “Jesus told this parable to certain people who had convinced themselves that they were righteous and who looked on everyone else with disgust.”

We can call this particular heart condition self-righteousness, spiritual pride and judgmentalism. Jesus told this parable and spoke elsewhere about this heart condition because he knew that his disciples would struggle with these same tendencies. This seems to arise from our insecurities, and our need to feel validated, affirmed or valued.
We tend to look at the faults of others through a magnifying glass, blowing up every shortcoming, while we wear frosted goggles when looking at our own lives, seeing few if any of our own faults. All people struggle with this. Conservatives do this to liberals, and liberals to conservatives. Uneducated and educated, rich and poor, white collar and blue collar all have ways of looking down on, or judging others.

Jesus spoke about this in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Don’t judge, so that you won’t be judged. You’ll receive the same judgment you give. Whatever you deal out will be dealt out to you. Why do you see the splinter that’s in your brother’s or sister’s eye, but don’t notice the log in your own eye? How can you say to your brother or sister, ‘Let me take the splinter out of your eye,’ when there’s a log in your eye? You deceive yourself! First take the log out of your eye, and then you’ll see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s or sister’s eye.” (Matthew 7:1-5)

- In what ways can this human tendency be particularly hard to avoid when we associate closely with others, like (for instance) in a small group? How can you keep from feeling better than another group member who has a struggle that is not a problem for you?

From Pastor Hamilton’s sermon:

That leads us to another of the questions Wesley asked to unmask the broken person within: Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy, or distrustful? That’s quite a list. Each should have been its own question, but they all tie into both Christian character and the ways we act that push others away, or hurt them. I’ll focus on just one, inviting you to consider the answer to the question, AM I CRITICAL? You know people who seem to look for the worst in everyone else. We call this heart condition a critical spirit. I think about people I have known who had a critical spirit—everything they see they speak ill of. Everyone they know they criticize. You’ve probably known people like this. And perhaps you have been in the past or still are, a person with a critical spirit.

A critical spirit easily becomes habitual. I read an article this week in Entrepreneur Magazine by Travis Bradberry who wrote the book Emotional Intelligence 2.0. Emotional Intelligence, sometimes referred to as EQ—Emotional Quotient—has to do with self-awareness concerning your emotions and what drives you, the ability to control your own negative emotions and urges, and your ability to empathize, have compassion for, and relate well to others….Bradberry observed that, over time, constant complaining rewrites our brain’s neural connections, making us ever more likely to complain....

Bradberry notes something else about a critical spirit. It is not only harmful to our relationship with others, and our relationship to God. Researchers have found that it is physically harmful to us. He described research from Stanford University and Frederich Schiller University in Germany that shows that complaining not only creates neural bridges that can make complaining habitual, but that complaining acts as a stressor to the brain, and 30 minutes a day or more of criticism and complaining can actually damage that part of the brain responsible for higher level reasoning and memory.¹

Ephesians 4:29, a passage many of us memorized here at Resurrection last year captures the biblical teaching on this: “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.” Paul goes on to say, “Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.”

- Think about your own patterns of speech and thought in light of Wesley’s question. Are there any areas (e.g. politics, sports, business competitors, maybe even church music) where you tend to “give yourself an exemption” from the teaching of Ephesians 4:29? How can you as a group gently challenge each other and steer your conversation away from criticism or complaining?

From Pastor Hamilton’s sermon:

The English word character is a transliteration of the Greek word CHARAKTARE, which meant something that was engraved, stamped, or etched. When used of humans it speaks of the soul or heart of an individual. When we speak of Christian character, it implies that our soul is engraved or stamped by the Holy Spirit with the image of Christ.

Prayer, Scripture study, small groups, worship, service are all ways to open your heart and soul to God’s shaping work. But here’s an important thing to know about God’s work in our lives: God works by invitation. We invite God to guide, work, lead, shape and move in our lives. We can give God part of our lives to work with, but retain control of other parts. Wesley meant his questions to help us see areas where we may not align with the image of Christ, areas that we’re willing to work in, and to invite God to work on, in perfecting us.

Ultimately, the defining mark of Christian spirituality is love. This is what the Holy Spirit intends to produce in us….Let’s read aloud together the words Paul uses to describe this quality of character God intends to emboss, engrave or etch on our hearts:

“Love is patient, love is kind, it isn’t jealous, it doesn’t brag, it isn’t arrogant, it isn’t rude, it doesn’t seek its own advantage, it isn’t irritable, it doesn’t keep a record of complaints, it isn’t happy with injustice, but it is happy with the truth. Love puts up with all things, trusts in all things, hopes for all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”

Paul ends the chapter with these famous words, “Faith hope and love remain, these three, but the greatest of these is love.”

- Pastor Hamilton noted that the love of which Paul spoke (agape) “is not a warm fuzzy feeling. It is a willingness to serve, to give, to bless, to protect, to sacrifice one’s self for the other.” In what ways is that kind of love particularly important when you deal with people you’re tempted to look down on, or to feel critical of? Even when you like one another, how can that kind of love bind your group together in ways that go beyond surface human friendship?