

THE WESLEY BROTHERS

THE LESSON: BEYOND INTELLECTUAL ASSENT

“When Christ was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”

(1 Peter 2:23)

John and Charles Wesley were born into a very large, religious family in early eighteenth century England. Their father was a priest, and their mother carefully oversaw the religious education of her 19 children. While the brothers were studying at Oxford they were part of a group of students who dedicated themselves to prayer, fasting, communion, the study of the scriptures, and holy living. They also visited prisons and cared for the poor. Their little circle of friends was not popular, and they were ridiculed by their peers as a “holy club” or “methodists” (because of their methodical devotion).

Some years later, having both entered ordained ministry, the Wesley brothers found themselves serving in the American colony of Georgia. Both were deeply discouraged by the seeming failure of their efforts in ministry there, so Charles returned to England after a short period, but John opted to stay on and stick it out, although not for long. John “was forced to leave under a cloud. A young woman whom he had courted had married another. Wesley, deeming the young bride frivolous, denied communion to her, and was sued for defamation” (Justo González, *The Story of Christianity, Volume 2*). At this blow, John too decided to return home. Parish ministry in Georgia had proved to be decidedly different from their “holy club” of earlier days.

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

(Romans 10:9)

John then remembered an experience he’d had on the boat going over to Georgia. He’d met some German missionaries (“Moravians”) who’d faced a storm with calmness and singing, while he, John, had been anxious for his own safety. One of these men had asked him whether he knew himself to be saved by Jesus. John had been unsettled by the question at the time, and now that he was experiencing an even more acute crisis of faith, he sought out a Moravian spiritual mentor and began to attend their meetings, as did his brother Charles. Then in their thirties, the brothers both had personal experiences of faith, which gave them a new confidence with which to move forward in life and ministry.

“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”

(Job 42:2)

John’s preaching had become a bit too enthusiastic for the average English parish at that time. Then George Whitefield, an old friend from “holy club” days, who had started an open-air preaching ministry, invited John to step in for him. The effect of this was immense. John saw revival at work – people coming to faith and being moved dramatically by the experience. He was uncomfortable with the seeming disorder of much of what he was now involved with, but decided not to get in the way of the amazing work that God was doing. Eventually John and George parted ways, and John’s ministry began to grow beyond what he could manage on his own. He needed help with preaching, and Charles was one of the men who answered the call. Charles was capable in more than preaching, and became a prolific hymn-writer, whose hymns were an excellent evangelistic tool in his day, and have inspired believers in every generation since.

Now, in John’s view, the meetings they held were a complement to Anglican worship, intended to prepare people to receive communion. But the movement created friction with leaders in the Church of England, who to some extent saw it as a judgement upon their own failings. John regarded himself as an Anglican priest seeking to bring a transformative

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experience of faith to those who attended church, and to preach the Gospel anew to those who didn't. Nevertheless, there continued to be a strain between John's movement and the Anglican hierarchy, and eventually, reluctantly, the "Methodist Church" began to call itself by this new name.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: CHRISTIANITYTODAY.COM, "JOHN WESLEY: METHODICAL PIETIST" | BRITANNICA.COM, "JOHN WESLEY" AND "CHARLES WESLEY" | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, "THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 2".)

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE "FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES", WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of John and Charles Wesley that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen. Decide on one concrete action you can take this week based on your reflections, *and* come back next week prepared to share a bit about your reflections and the action you took.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

O God, who by thy Holy Spirit hast given unto one man a word of wisdom, and to another a word of knowledge, and to another the gift of tongues: We praise thy Name for the gifts of grace manifested in thy servants John and Charles, and we pray that thy Church may never be destitute of the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH, POET, OR SCHOLAR, P. 317)