

CHARLES SIMEON

THE LESSON: PATIENT ENDURANCE

*“Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?”
(Psalm 85:6)*

The nineteenth century was a time of revival in the Church of England. Passionate “evangelical” leaders began to emerge, calling people to genuine conversion, immersion in the study of scripture, and a “newness of life” marked by holiness and social concern. The names of John Wesley and George Whitefield had become well known, but though their ministries had seen remarkable growth, many Anglicans considered evangelical enthusiasm to be dangerous to the establishment and disruptive to a form of religion that had become comfortably complacent.

*“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”
(Proverbs 9:10)*

Charles was the youngest of four sons born to an unbelieving father. The family was wealthy and Charles was sent to an exclusive boarding school where he had the reputation of being vain, and where he was surrounded by vice. Following this, Charles attended Cambridge University, where he was told that he would be required to attend services of Holy Communion. This created a sense of panic in Charles’ heart, as he feared committing the sacrilege of receiving communion in an unworthy manner. He wrote, “Conscience told me that Satan was as fit to go there as I” (Moorman, *History*). For this reason, he began to try to prepare himself through reading, repentance and prayer.

The “crash course” that Charles put himself through resulted in a genuine spiritual awakening. He came to realize that Jesus’ sacrifice for sin had made possible his redemption. Charles’ personal failings did not disappear overnight, but he moved forward in his faith in a spirit of humility and serious devotion. These habits of holiness fostered in him a patient endurance that was to be much needed in the hardships that he would encounter in his life and ministry.

*“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,
for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.”
(James 1:2-3)*

In his early twenties, Charles was appointed to serve as vicar at Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge. But no sooner had Charles been appointed to his new position than he found he was facing an uphill battle. The parishioners did not want this “evangelical” for their vicar, the teachers did not want him for a colleague, and students were openly hostile. Picture this: parishioners with “rented pews” refused to attend church themselves, and actually locked their pews so that no one else could sit there. When Charles tried to add seats in the aisles so that attendees could sit instead of standing, his churchwardens threw the chairs out into the churchyard. Students shouted and rioted in the streets to disrupt the services, throwing rocks, eggs and filth at Charles when he was coming and going. He recalled being surprised on one occasion when a fellow of his College chose to walk a short distance with him. The opposition Charles experienced continued for over 30 years.

Although these difficult years were long, eventually Charles’ patient endurance began to win people over. Charles drew comfort and inspiration from the humble example of Jesus. In due course people saw the witness of Charles’ life. They saw that he lived simply, giving much of his income to the poor. They saw, too, how he “turned the other cheek” – year after year. Eventually, the parishioners stopped locking their pews and attendance at the church grew. Charles had the opportunity to mentor students in the faith. He founded missionary societies, and gained a reputation for his strong biblical preaching. On receiving an inheritance, Charles set up a fund to help bring about more evangelical appointments in Anglican parishes.

CHARLES SIMEON

Throughout his life, Charles remained unmarried and celibate, an intentional choice which enabled him to remain in his position at Cambridge and devote himself to the ministry to which God had called him. He died at the age of 77, having ministered for more than fifty years in that one place. On the day of his funeral, shops closed their doors and people crowded the streets. The once despised preacher ended his life in honour, and his legacy continues to inspire believers to this day.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: CHRISTIANITYTODAY.COM, “CHARLES SIMEON: EVANGELICAL MENTOR AND MODEL” | BRITANNICA.COM, “CHARLES SIMEON” | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, “THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 2” | JOHN MOORMAN, “HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND” | JOHN PIPER, “BROTHERS, WE MUST NOT MIND A LITTLE SUFFERING: MEDITATIONS ON THE LIFE OF CHARLES SIMEON” | JOHN STOTT, “JOHN STOTT ON CHARLES SIMEON AT TAYLOR UNIVERSITY”.)

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/bcp-online/family-prayer))

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

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you’ve chosen. Discuss your reflections with a friend or a group of friends, and together commit to a concrete action you can take this week.

- 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 servant 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)