

THE WESLEY BROTHERS

CHECKLIST: WHAT YOU NEED

- Paper, pens/pencils
- Copies of the downloadable “622 service” and “Prayers & Thanksgivings” booklets
- Copies of the lesson handout
- Copy of the leader's notes
- OPTIONAL: Bibles (ESV or similar recommended)
- OPTIONAL: A white board, easel pad, or chalk board with markers/chalk
- OPTIONAL: Have notebooks on hand for teens to take home and use as prayer journals if they wish

ICE BREAKER: THE ORIGINAL “SOLAS”

Write these Latin words on your board: “Scriptura, Fide, Gratia”. Ask your teens to see how many words they can come up with by rearranging the letters.

Introduce the activity by telling your teens that these three words were central to what the Reformers wanted to reclaim with regard to the Christian message: Sola Scriptura meant “by scripture alone” (as opposed to tradition), Sola Fide meant “by faith alone” (as opposed to works), and Sola Gratia meant “by grace alone” (as opposed to merit).

DEPENDING ON YOUR GROUP, YOU MIGHT ASK THE TEENS TO WORK ON THE WORDS INDIVIDUALLY ON THEIR OWN PAPER OR IN TEAMS TO COMPETE FOR THE LONGEST LIST, OR HAVE THEM WORK ALL TOGETHER.

622: BEGINNING WITH PRAYER

Begin the formal part of the lesson by saying together the first part of the order for service for young people in the booklet, up to the middle of page 4.

AT THIS POINT IN THE LESSON, ASK IF THE TEENS SUCCEEDED IN DOING LAST WEEK’S CHALLENGE, HOW IT WENT, AND WHETHER THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO SHARE.

DISCUSSION: TRUSTING WHOLLY

As an introduction to the lesson ask the teens to discuss the following questions.

DEPENDING ON THE COMFORT LEVEL FOR SHARING IN YOUR GROUP, IT MAY BE EASIER TO HAVE THEM VOLUNTEER ANSWERS WITH ALL RESPONSES WRITTEN TOGETHER ON A BOARD.

- What does it mean to “wholly trust” someone?
Is there anyone in your life that you wholly trust?
Do you feel that you wholly trust God?
- Ask your teens to respond to this quote from C.S. Lewis: **“Christ says, ‘Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You.’”**

A few things worth pointing out (if they don’t otherwise arise during the discussion):

- *When we wholly trust someone it means that we do not hesitate to place ourselves in their hands. Not everyone deserves our whole trust, but as we get to know people we find out that there are some who want what’s best for us even though they may make mistakes sometimes, and we can trust them with ourselves. But because people are flawed, chances are that our trust usually has caveats attached. You may trust one person with a secret, but not to prepare a meal for you; you may trust another to drive you safely to school, but not to remember your birthday. The more we get to know God, the more we know that he is worthy of our whole trust, but learning to trust is still a lifelong process for most of us.*

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- *It's possible for us to "compartmentalize" ourselves and only give a part of ourselves to God. Lewis is making the point that God doesn't just want a piece of us – but our whole mind, heart, and will. The summary of the law given by Jesus begins with the words, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind" (Luke 10:27).*

THE LESSON: BEYOND INTELLECTUAL ASSENT

Lessons 13-42 follow a slightly different format from previous lessons. The story of the saints being studied is interspersed with verses from scripture that provide added perspective. You may prefer to read the lesson text aloud together as a group, or ask the teens to read it silently to themselves.

"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

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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 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”.)

Then ask the teens to respond to what they’ve just read. Here are some questions to help guide the discussion.

- What were the things that contributed to John’s (and Charles’) crisis of faith? Is a “crisis of faith” something you can identify with?
- What did the Wesley brothers do about their crises of faith?
- What can we learn from the example of the Wesley brothers?

A few notes and reflections for reference:

- *The Wesleys had always been serious about their faith. They’d had correct beliefs and they’d followed that up with serious devotion, but something for them was missing: personal trust. What John discovered on his boat ride over to Georgia was that the Moravian missionaries had a trust in God that allowed them to be calm and joyful regardless of the circumstances, and John, in spite of his intellectual belief and good works, was lacking in this area. Moreover, things in America did not go as they had hoped. Instead of seeing their efforts flourish, the brothers ended up leaving in a cloud of disappointment and shame. When things do not go the way we expect them to, especially if we believe we are doing things in God’s service, it can be a great blow to our faith. But a “crisis of faith” serves one crucial purpose – it gives us the opportunity to set aside our pride and our assumptions, and seek God in humility and earnestness. It makes us teachable. If we do not allow the crisis to turn us away from God, we may find that he is exposing an area that we need to work on, or showing us a path forward that we had not imagined.*
- *The Wesleys did not turn away from God; instead they sought wise counsel from Christian mentors that they respected. They also kept attending meetings with other believers. In doing this, the Wesleys allowed God to show them what was lacking and to draw them into a closer relationship with himself, giving them a renewed confidence and zeal for the work that he had in mind for them.*
- *Even as very young men still at school, the brothers and their friends were models of devotion. They disregarded the ridicule of their peers, and carried on praying, fasting, taking communion, studying scripture, visiting prisons and caring for the poor. When their crises of faith hit, the Wesleys did not turn their backs on God, but kept on meeting with believers and sought out Christian mentors. Later on, when the opportunity arose again to serve God, they were equipped with a new confidence to answer the call, and answer it they did. They poured themselves into the work, seeking to trust and discern God’s direction as they moved forward, bearing witness to all that he was doing.*

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DURING EACH LESSON, IF THE TEENS RAISE THEOLOGICAL OR BIBLICAL QUESTIONS THAT YOU DON'T FEEL CONFIDENT ABOUT ANSWERING, SAY SO, BUT LET THEM KNOW THAT YOU'LL FIND THE ANSWER AND RESPOND AT THE NEXT MEETING.

PREVIEW: AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Take a brief moment to look at the at-home challenge together.

THE WEEKLY "AT-HOME CHALLENGE" IS TYPICALLY A SIMPLE ASSIGNMENT TO SPEND SOME QUIET TIME IN PRIVATE PRAYER. ENCOURAGE THE TEENS TO GET NOTEBOOKS THAT CAN BE USED AS PRAYER JOURNALS. ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL NOT BE REQUIRED TO SHOW THEIR JOURNAL OR THEIR PRIVATE PRAYERS TO ANYONE.

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)

CLOSING PRAYERS (622 AGAIN)

Close with any prayers that might be appropriate in the context of the discussion of the day.

AT THE END OF EACH LESSON, IF YOU FIND THAT YOU STILL HAVE LOTS OF TIME REMAINING, YOU MIGHT CHOOSE TO TAKE SOME TIME TO EXPLORE THE "PRAYERS AND THANKSGIVINGS" SECTION IN THE BCP (PAGES 39-62, OR YOU CAN USE THE DOWNLOADABLE BOOKLET). AS YOUR GROUP MEMBERS COME ACROSS PRAYERS THAT THEY FIND RELEVANT, PAUSE AND PRAY THEM TOGETHER. IF YOU'RE PRESSED FOR TIME, YOU MIGHT CLOSE WITH THE THEMED PRAYER FROM THE AT-HOME CHALLENGE.

Then finish with the "Grace", the final prayer in the booklet.