



New Member's Class 101

The Story of John Wesley

Founder of Methodism



- Samuel Wesley was the father of John Wesley; the man who would go on to become the founder of the Methodist movement.
- Samuel Wesley was born on December 17, 1662 and died on April 5, 1735.
- In 1697 Samuel Wesley was appointed as the pastor to the Epworth Church in the rural districts of Lincolnshire.
- His high liturgies, loyalist politics, and academic proclivities made him a complete mismatch for his rural parish.



- Susanna (Annesley) Wesley was born on January 20, 1669 and died on July 23, 1742.
- Her father was a famous “dissenter” pastor; which is to say that he was against the Church of England.
- At age 13, she left her father’s church and joined the Church of England.
- She continued to have access to her father’s considerable library, and was well read in the Christian classics.
- This was very rare for a woman of her era.
- Susanna Wesley married Samuel Wesley on November 8, 1688.



- Susanna Wesley had 19 children. 8 died during infancy, including two sets of twins. One died during childhood. The others lived well into adulthood.
- Susanna Wesley endeavored to raise her children with strict discipline.
- At one point, Samuel Wesley had to go to London to help a friend who was put on trial.
- This left Susanna at home with the children.
- Samuel left a local man in charge of the church, but all he ever preached about was paying debts.
- Susanna Wesley wanted her children to have a more spiritually enriched experience.



- She decided that she would have church with just her family on Sunday afternoons.
- They would sing psalms and then she would preach one of her husbands or one of her father's sermons.
- The people of the town got interested and several asked if they could attend.
- Over 200 were in attendance when it was said and done.
- Susanna Wesley was interested in daily devotionals and was intent on leading a holy life.
- She had a profound impact on her children; especially John and his younger brother Charles.



- John Wesley was born June 28, 1703.
- He was the fifteenth child born to Samuel and Susanna Wesley.



- On February 9, 1709, some of the townspeople who were upset with Samuel Wesley decided to set fire to the Wesley's house.
- John Wesley, who was only 5 years old at the time, was trapped at the stairway landing on the top floor.
- As it appeared that his young son would be lost to the flames, Samuel Wesley knelt in prayer and commended his son's soul to God.
- But while other neighbors set up a bucket brigade, others formed a human ladder and reached John. They rescued him just as the floor collapsed into the flames.
- The incident had a great impact on the Wesley family. They realized that God had spared John's life and set him aside for a special purpose.



- Wesley's next phase of life was to become a student. He graduated from Oxford University.
- Wesley continued to live a rigorously religious life and sought to live a life of moral perfection in hopes that he would be saved.
- In the year of his ordination, 1725, he read Jeremy Taylor and Thomas a Kempis as well as Law's A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life.
- He lived a life of deprivation, studied the scriptures, gave alms to the poor, and sought to live a life of holiness of heart and life.
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- Eventually John Wesley took over the leadership of a newly formed group on the Oxford campus. It was called: "The Holy Club."
- The Holy Club, originally started by Charles, was devoted to study and the pursuit of a holy life. When John took it over, it became even more intense.
- The group met daily from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. for prayer, psalms, and the reading of the Greek New Testament.
- They set aside the first few minutes of each hour for prayer, and prayed for a special virtue daily. They fasted each Wednesday and Friday.
- In 1730 The Holy Club began to visit prisoners in jail. They preached. They paid the debts of debtors whenever possible. They cared for the sick.
- In spite of all of his outward acts and works, Wesley felt that his heart was cold and that he had not truly received the grace of Jesus Christ.
- Fellow Oxford students chided The Holy Club for their excesses. They called them "Bible Moths" and "Enthusiasts." Wesley's favorite "offense" was to be called "Methodist." It stuck.



- On October 14, 1735, John and his brother Charles Wesley set sail on the H.M.S. Simmonds from Gravesend to Savannah, Georgia.
- Charles was sailing to Georgia to become the secretary to Governor Oglethorpe. John was going to be the chaplain.
- While they were at sea, a great storm came and put the ship in danger. The high winds snapped the mast. John Wesley feared for his life.
- While he was full of obedience to God's word, his heart was empty. If he were to die, he was uncertain as to where he would spend eternity.
- There was a group of Christians who were also aboard The Simmonds. They were called "Moravians." They were immigrating to Georgia to start new lives.
- The Moravians did not seem to be fearful during the storm. They were full of inner-peace. Wesley knew that this peace was something that he lacked.
- After they finally arrived to Georgia, Wesley decided to seek out the Moravian pastor. His name was Peter Bohler.
- Wesley asked Bohler about the inner peace of the Moravians. He asked him how they received it.
- Bohler asked Wesley: "Do you know that Jesus Christ died on the cross for you?"
- Wesley responded: "I know that He died for the sins of the entire world."
- Bohler pressed Wesley further: "Do you know that Jesus died on the cross specifically for you?"
- Wesley answered "Yes." But later on that night, Wesley wrote in his journal: "I feel that these were vain (empty, meaningless) words."
- The peace that Wesley sought through Christ was, at this point, only a theory in his mind, not a reality in his heart.
- Wesley learned from Peter Bohler and the Moravians that the heart knowledge of Jesus' peace and salvation and His indwelling peace and presence is an option.
- Wesley returned from Georgia a hurt and broken man, but he continued to fellowship with the Moravians and to seek out a religion of the heart.





- Upon his return to London, Wesley continued to fellowship with the Moravians.
- On May 24, 1738, Wesley decided to go to a Moravian prayer meeting, even though he didn't feel like it.
- Once arrived, someone started to read Martin Luther's preface to the book of Romans. During this, Wesley experienced something new.
- Wesley wrote in his journal: "I suddenly felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."
- This is referred to as "The Aldersgate Experience." Wesley's faith expanded from the mind to include the heart.
- This has been a hallmark of Methodists ever since; to have an informed mind and a warm heart that is assured of the grace of Jesus unto life.

- With his new, warm heart and his assurance of grace for salvation, John Wesley began to preach with zeal and authority.
- The stodgy, established churches had no appreciation for this new fire in Wesley's heart, and several closed their doors to him.
- Eventually, Wesley was invited to attend a preaching session with fellow Holy Club member George Whitefield.
- Whitefield, like Wesley and other Holy Club members had also received a heart warming experience. Doors to churches had been closed to him as well.
- Not to be deterred, Whitefield simply began to preach in the open air. He invited John Wesley to imitate his example.
- As a result of this, the common people began to hear the message of Christ, conviction, forgiveness, grace and redemption. The movement spread.
- The preaching of John Wesley and the Methodists transformed the English society. People began to live holy lives for Christ.
- Wesley rode over 250,000 miles and preached over 40,000 sermons over his lifetime.
- Historians say that the social and moral decadence that the French experienced during this same period were avoided because of the Methodist revival.
- John Wesley is remembered and regarded as the most influential person of the 18th century because of his warm-hearted proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.