

Beginnings of Methodism

Historical Theology
January 7, 2024
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I. SAMUEL & SUSANNA WESLEY

- A) 19 children, 10 survived to adulthood
- B) Samuel was Anglican Rector at Epworth, England.
- C) Susanna was a loving, strict and methodical woman and mother.
- D) Susanna spent an hour with every child every day training them, praying with them, and reviewing the recent events in their lives.

II. JOHN WESLEY (JUNE 28, 1703 - MARCH 2, 1791)

- A) Rescued from burning house when he was 5 years old. His mother described him as, "A brand plucked from the fire." And said that God must have saved him for some very specific purpose.
- B) Went to college at Chris's Church, Oxford.

- C) While at college he decided he did not want to live a duplicitous life and began methodically cultivating a Christian lifestyle.
- D) In September 1727 John left Oxford to assist his father by serving as priest in one of the parishes he was responsible for.
- E) John again left Epworth and returned to Oxford in November 1729. To assist with a parish there and maintain his status as a lecturer at Oxford.

III. CHARLES WESLEY (DECEMBER 18, 1707 - MARCH 29, 1788)

- A) Also in 1727 Charles enrolled at Christ's Church, Oxford, and a short time later began gathering with a few friends for prayer, accountability and Bible study. They held each other to such high standards that other students began mockingly referring to them as the, "Holy Club."

- B) When John returned to Oxford he joined Charles' club and was soon functioning as the leader.
- C) Another young man named George Whitefield also joined the "Holy Club" around this time..
- D) Tenets of the "Holy Club"
 1. Met daily from 6-9AM for prayer and Bible reading
 2. Prayed every hour of the day for a few minutes
 3. Took communion every Sunday (at this time the Anglican church only required attendance on 3 Sundays per year)
 4. Fasted Wednesdays and Fridays until 3PM
 5. Visited people who were in prison, especially the debtors prison.

IV. JOHN & CHARLES GO TO AMERICA (1735 - 1737)

- A) On the ocean crossing the Wesleys shared a ship with some Moravians who were also moving to America. When a significant storm left John in terror he noted that the Moravians were very calm. John discovered that they were convinced God would keep them safe or take them to Heaven, and thus weren't worried about the storm
- B) Charles became ill and returned to England early.
- C) John fled Savannah, GA for England after he refused to serve communion to a young lady under some murky circumstances, and was then sued for slander.
- D) Upon his return to England John found that Charles had begun meeting with a group of Moravians and had experienced a "conversion experience." John soon joined the group as well and had a similar experience.

- E) John then began preaching sermons on topics like salvation by faith and free grace. The next year John visited Hernhut to learn more about the Moravians. Upon his return to England he was almost completely banned from preaching in Anglican Churches.

V. OPEN AIR PREACHING

- A) George Whitefield had a similar experience about this time and began preaching out doors he encouraged John to do the same.
- B) John was very reluctant about the lack of liturgy, religious trappings and such, but on April 2, 1739 he preached in a brickyard to any and all who were present.
- C) He soon concluded that it was very effective at reaching those people who would never enter an Anglican church building.

VI. METHODISM GAINS TRACTION

- A) As people began to respond to the preaching John realized they needed discipleship and fellowship.
- B) Following the Pietist model of small groups that he had seen employed by the Moravians he began organizing small groups in layers with capable lay preachers, some of whom were women, whom John thought could guide the spiritual development of the people in their small groups in a style of cultivating personal holiness much like the Pietists and Moravians. The lay preachers also often participated in open air preaching to the masses eventually leading the group to be self-replicating.

C) So strong was the movement that the many people began to take notice of them. There was much persecution, mostly they were ridiculed for their zealous adherence to the methods of holy living they were taught sparking the name "Methodist" which John quickly adopted as title of honor rather than shame. They were accused of sedition and seeking to overthrow the Anglican Church and by extension the monarchy even though the small groups were expected to meet at a time and place that did not conflict with Methodists attending Anglican services which they were expected to do regularly. Some of the persecution was also violent, but the movement grew massively. One estimate put the number of Methodists in England and America at around 120,000 at the time of John's death.

SOURCES

- Wikipedia.com
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 - Charles Wesley
 - Methodism
- Youtube.com
 - John Wesley: The Faith that Sparked the Methodist Movement
 - Wesley and Whitefield
 - The Life of John Wesley
 - History of Methodism