

What has it historically meant to be a Methodist? How does Methodism differ from other denominations?

(compiled by Wendy DeLemos)

John and Charles Wesley did not mean to start a new religion, but to breathe new life into the Church of England. They were both ordained Priests of the Church of England, like 3 generations before them.

*Methodism was a small Group movement of **empowered lay people**. They watched over one another in love with mutual accountability in Methodist Meetings.

In **Class Meetings**, participants actively discuss the state of their current relationship with God and how they are living out (and sometimes failing to live out) their faith.

Christianity... is a **social religion**...it cannot subsist at all without society, without living and conversing with other members. Christian discipleship begins with God's offer of relationship to us all, but it is extended by means of fellowship within the community of faith.

God's **grace is universally available!** There is no predestination only Prevenient Grace which goes before us constantly waiting for us to accept it. *We are justified (pardoned and accepted) freely (without any merit of our own) by grace (not our own righteousness or work) freely by his grace (by the goodness of God.)*

"A commitment to an earth renewed in righteousness..." makes the Wesleyan tradition different from those which emphasize otherworldly salvation and is key to their focus on Social Justice. **Salvation** is not on the other side of death. It is not something at a distance. It is a **present thing**, a blessing you possess through the free mercy of God; A restoration of the soul to health.

The Wesleys did not believe that "entire sanctification" was an action completed instantaneously and permanently. On the contrary, **holiness is always a process**. Anyone who has experienced sanctification, "let him speak more convincingly by his life than he can do by his tongue. "We are every hour and every moment pleasing or displeasing to God according to our works."

Wesley's experiential mode of theology. Spiritual sensation and biblical reflection: The word introduces us to the Spirit and the Spirit opens up the word.

Early Methodism was a rediscovery of the Word, meaning both Jesus Christ and the Bible. **The Bible is the authoritative word, but it is balanced by tradition, reason and experience.**

John Wesley believed that the Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote the bible, but continually inspires, supernaturally assists, those that read it with earnest prayer. Without the Spirit of Christ governing one's approach to the Bible, it can easily become a tyrant. The key is allowing the Bible to retain authority over the Christian faith and its practice without allowing it to become authoritarian.

The Wesleys guarded against this danger through their **spirit-centered approach to scripture**. Their concern was to allow the living Word to shine through.

They read the scripture worshipfully, systematically, comprehensively, purposefully and corporately. They also read Scripture "through the eyes of faith" and in the "guidance of the Holy Spirit."

First they placed themselves in God's presence and asked for God's guidance. Next they pictured themselves in the story, and pondered the meaning of the events and insights in their own lives. Finally,

they made sure to put into practice whatever discovery about themselves they had made. The movement was always from reading, meditation and contemplation to action. Very similar to the Class Meeting weekly agenda.

The movement of the spirit is **from contemplation to action**. Read as much as you can, that God may use you as much as God can. The Wesleys wanted a well-informed laity who had the skills and wisdom to face the challenges of faith in the marketplace. Hannah Ball, a leading member of the Methodist Society of High Wycombe, was the pioneer of Sunday Schools in England. (1760's)

The importance of **Communion**. God confirmed the message of good news through the action of the Eucharist. Wesley realized that true evangelism (God's word proclaimed) could only be grounded in worship and the center of Christian worship was the meeting of pulpit and table. John Wesley communed on an average of once every four days, and during the seasons of Christmas and Easter he received the sacrament daily.

What about Wesleyan Christianity is important to us in our local church setting? What do we want to affirm and nurture about this tradition?

The importance of a **"heart" religion**.

Our experience of God's love produces love to all mankind. Our works are the consequence of a healthy relationship with God. The fact of God's presence in our lives is shown, or made complete, in our works.

Do not turn a religion of Love into a mere spiritual formality. But don't neglect the forms (praying, going to church, fellowship) or you will lose the power as well.

God's love is the only proper foundation for discipleship in Christ. **To become loving as Christ is loving is the purpose of discipleship**. The ultimate purpose of theology is transformation, and everyone is called to be a theologian, to be changed by God into more loving, more Christlike people.

We should always **desire to know and love God more**. God does not continue to breathe into our souls unless our soul breathes back toward him.

The experience of God's love "produces **love to all humankind**," showing everyone to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

No separation of self-love and neighbor-love. We find ourselves by giving ourselves for others.

In the [United Methodist Church Book of Discipline](#), the phrase appears in the doctrinal history section as **"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity."**

A few lines later, the mandate is emphasized as "the crucial matter in religion is steadfast love for God and neighbor, empowered by the redeeming and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit."

Do we consider defending the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ people to be essential or non-essential?

Can we stay in a denomination that considers it non-essential?

If God is calling us to love, what is the loving thing to do?

Do we stay and try to bring the church along, or do we prioritize caring for the outcast?