

# HEROES OF THE FAITH

## John Wesley

Edition 3

### John Wesley

#### Biographical Information

**NAME:**

John Wesley

**BIRTH:**

28 June 1703

Epworth, Lincolnshire, England

**DEATH:**

2 March 1791 (aged 87)

London, England

**OCCUPATION:**

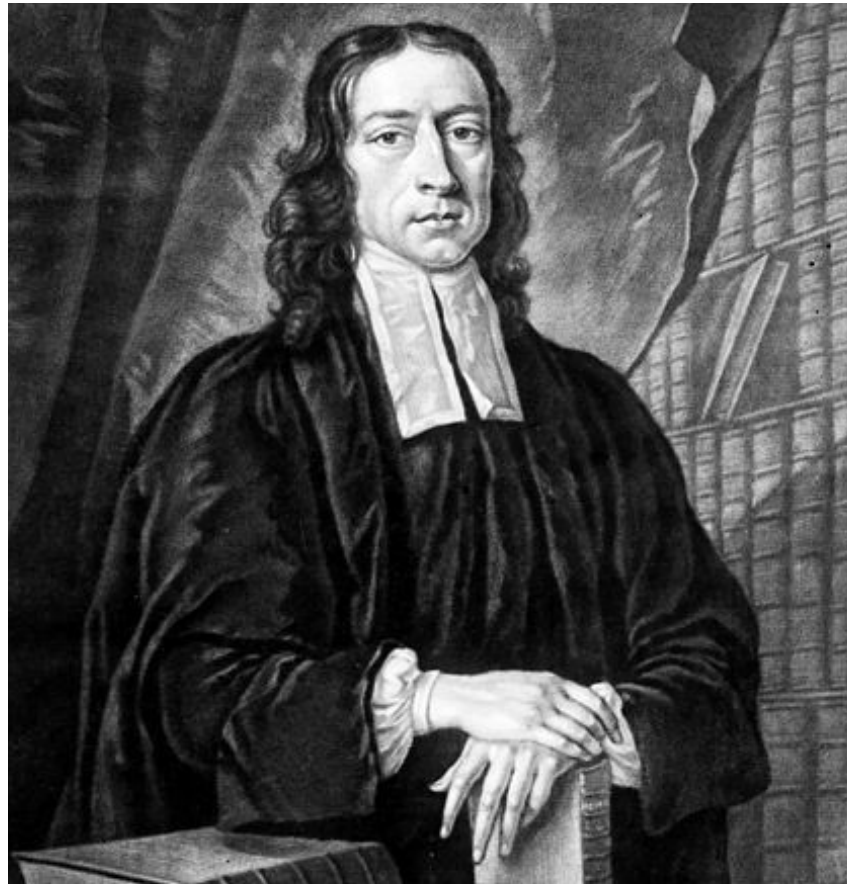
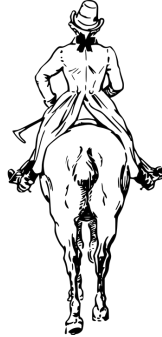
Cleric, theologian, evangelist and founder of the Methodist church

**SPOUSE:**

Mary Vazeille (m.1751; separated 1758)

**PARENTS:**

Samuel and Susanna Wesley



John Wesley. Mezzotint by J. Faber, junior, 1743, after J. Williams. Public domain.

A Life Lived for God

## Who was John Wesley?

“Light yourself on fire with passion and people will come from miles to watch you burn.”

John Wesley was an English cleric, theologian and evangelist. He was also the founder of the Methodist Church movement in England with his brother Charles.

John was born on 17 June 1709 in Epworth, Lincolnshire, England, to Reverend Samuel Wesley and his wife, Susanna. John was their fifteenth child – their seventh to survive. He was followed by three more children, Martha, Charles and Kezia.

After an education at Charterhouse and Christ Church, Oxford, John was elected as a fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, in 1726. He was ordained as an Anglican minister two years later. He had always believed that eternal salvation depended on the good things he could do to prepare himself for heaven. In 1738 he had a conversion experience that changed this belief. He then became convinced that salvation came only as a gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Throughout a period of 54 years, John travelled about 8,000 kilometres a year, ministering the Word of God, most of that on horseback (some say the distance was even greater). In all, he travelled at least 467,000 kilometres (a distance equal to circumnavigating the globe about twelve times). While he travelled, John read extensively on all subjects. He also authored 250 books and pamphlets.

Throughout his lifetime, John preached approximately 42,000 sermons (no less than 20 sermons a week, often many more). Most of these sermons were delivered in the open air. The crowds he spoke before sometimes numbered between twenty to forty thousand people.

John also had tens of thousands of souls under his pastoral care who he would faithfully visit as he travelled around England. He also established schools, built chapels and raised funds to carry on the work.

But statistics and facts alone cannot begin to convey how powerfully God worked through John Wesley. The Holy Spirit impacted and transformed thousands of lives through John's preaching. Some historians have suggested that Wesley's preaching saved England from social unrest and a revolution similar to that of France. As revival erupted across the land, God's power “laid hold of the lower classes and converted them before they were ripe for explosion.”<sup>1</sup>

When John died in 1791, there were 72,000 Methodists in his home country and an additional 43,000 adherents in America. Under Wesley's direction, Methodists became leaders in many social issues of the day, including the abolition of slavery and prison reform. John Wesley's ministry influenced social reformers such as William Wilberforce, John Howard and William Booth.

# How John came to know God

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus will be saved." Rom 10:13

John Wesley was born into a Christian home. He was raised to respect God and the Bible and adhere to strict spiritual disciplines. As a young man, John made resolutions to live a holy life and began to keep an introspective diary. Every Saturday night, he would open his diary and examine himself, jotting down his failings. Reaching Christian perfection became the driving force of John's life. He believed that the road to God was arduous and that people must perform frequent religious duties if they would be true Christians.

While at Oxford, John led a religious study group called the "Holy Club." Several men, including George Whitfield, were members of this club. They were scornfully called the "Methodists" because of their emphasis on methodical study and devotion. Members of the group rose early, at four or five o'clock in the morning. They prayed regularly throughout the day, read the Bible, attended chapel, practised self-denial, and fasted twice a week. They also added social services to their activities, taking it upon themselves to help prisoners and the poor in their communities.

In 1736, John and Charles went to Georgia as missionaries. As they travelled to America, a terrible storm battered their ship, and John became terrified that they would all die. A group of Moravian missionaries were also aboard, but unlike John, they remained calm and unruffled throughout the entire ordeal. Instead of panicking, they prayed to God and sang hymns. With amazement, John observed that they possessed no fear of death. He wrote:

*"I went to America to convert the Indians; but oh, who will convert me? Who, what is it that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well, nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near. But let death look me in the face, and my spirit is trouble...."*

When they arrived in Georgia, the Wesley brothers met another Moravian man called August Spangenberg. John asked for advice on how best to proceed as a missionary. To John's surprise, August didn't give him any advice but

instead put several questions before him: "Do you know yourself?" August asked. "Have you the witness in yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?"

John was perplexed and did not know how to answer, so Spangenberg asked him directly, "Do you know Jesus Christ?"

John paused, then replied: "I know he is the Saviour of the World."

"True," said August. "But do you know he has saved you?"

With hesitation, John murmured, "I hope he has died to save me."

Later, John wrote in his diary that the Moravians had endeavoured to show him "a more excellent way." He admitted, "I understood it not at first. I was too learned and too wise. So that it seemed foolishness to me. And I continued preaching, and following after, and trusting in that righteousness whereby no flesh can be justified."

Charles returned to England in 1736, but John stayed longer and returned in 1738. John's time in America had been a disaster. He had failed as a missionary, and his future was now uncertain.

While in London, the Wesley brothers met another Moravian man called Peter Böhler. Peter liked John and Charles but concluded that both were far from true faith. Peter contended that true faith in Christ always brought forth two fruits: "Dominion over sin, and constant peace from a sense of forgiveness."

John disagreed and argued that forgiveness and peace must be earned by unceasing effort. He believed that he must become holy through his own endeavours before he could be saved.

Peter said to him: "Believe and you will be saved. Believe in the Lord Jesus with all your heart, and nothing shall be impossible to you! This faith, like the salvation it brings, is the free gift of God. Seek and you will find." He then added strong words that penetrated John's heart and mind: "Strip yourself naked of your own good works, and your own righteousness, and go naked to him! For anyone that comes to him he will in no wise cast out."

Peter declared that this salvation could

even come instantly to the worst of sinners if they turned from their sins and trusted Christ alone.

John was shocked! But God's Holy Spirit was deep at work inside his soul. After much struggle, John finally admitted he was under a heavy yoke, and the more he tried to be holy through his own efforts, the more he sinned.

On 24 May 1738, John attended a Moravian meeting in London. He said:

*"In the evening, I went unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."*

The following day, John said, "the moment I awaked, 'Jesus, Master' was in my heart and in my mouth, and I found all my strength lay in keeping my eye fixed upon him."

John had experienced the New Birth through faith in Jesus Christ alone. A few days before John's experience, Charles had also received "the living faith."

The Holy Spirit was already moving through England at that time. An extraordinary revival had broken out in Bristol under the preaching of George Whitfield. He, too, had experienced the New Birth and now proclaimed "free grace" for sinners in all his sermons. Charles said of the revival, "God has poured out his Spirit upon them, so that the whole nation is in an uproar!"

This uproar exploded all the more as John began to preach the same message with power and boldness wherever he went.



**Into the highways & byways**

“And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness...” Isaiah 35:8

After John’s heart had been “strangely warmed” and he had experienced the New Birth, John could not remain silent. His sermons now proclaimed the key message, “By grace ye are saved through faith.” He expounded the need for all people to come to life-saving faith through Jesus Christ so that they could be saved from sin and the consequences of sin. John declared, “Nothing but this can give a check to the immorality which hath overspread the land as a flood.”

John and Charles spoke about Christ to everyone who would listen, but churches everywhere began to shut their doors to the Wesley brothers and also to George Whitfield. The established church at that time was formal and respectable, and the clergymen were generally opposed to the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. Whitfield said of these churchmen, “I am fully convinced there is a fundamental difference between us and them. They believe only in an outward Christ, we further believe that he must be inwardly formed in our hearts also.”

John, Charles and George began to preach outdoors, and as they did, large crowds followed them wherever they went. They preached in open fields and meadows, city streets and highways. Their message was that all individuals were guilty before God — rich and poor, high and low. This offended one

proud duchess who admonished, “It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting.”

Although some rejected the call to salvation, the Holy Spirit moved among the multitudes who were “indeed ripe for the Gospel”, and thousands experienced the New Birth. Many of the outcasts of the day — such as harlots, thieves, prisoners and drunkards — received the message with gladness. John, Charles and George also preached to the coal miners, who were considered “lawless, brutal, and worse than heathen.” Their hearts were so moved that their tears made “white gutters... down their black cheeks.”

John knew he was following the call of God. He said:

*“I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that, in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation. This is the work which I know God has called me to; and sure I am that His blessing attends it. Great encouragement have I, therefore, to be faithful in fulfilling the work He hath given.”*

**The Powerful Gospel**

“Our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.” 1 Thessalonians 1:5

As John preached the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit moved among the crowds with amazing power, both to convict and to comfort.

On one occasion, as John spoke, the presence of God so filled the place that many found themselves suddenly cut to the heart. John said of that occasion:

*“And while poor sinners felt the sentence of death in their souls, what sounds of distress did I hear! The greatest number of them who cried or fell, were men; but some women, and several children, felt the power of the same almighty Spirit, and seemed just sinking into hell. This occasioned a mixture of various sounds; some shrieking, some roaring aloud. The most general was a loud breathing, like that of people half strangled and gasping for life. And indeed, almost all the cries were like those of human creatures dying in bitter anguish. Great numbers wept without any noise; others fell down as dead; some sinking in silence; some with extreme noise and violent agitation.”*

Such experiences were frequent in the meetings. As God’s power came upon people, they often “dropped on every side as thunderstruck.” Many would weep, groan or tremble as the Holy Spirit convicted them of their sin. Then

they would be “changed in a moment from the spirit of fear, horror, despair, to the spirit of love, joy, and peace; and from sinful desire, till then reigning over them, to a pure desire of doing the will of God.”

Cries of agony always turned into spontaneous and joyous praise. This instant change inside a person’s soul became immediately visible in their countenance. Their faces would often shine, reflecting great peace and happiness.

The inward change of the New Birth also brought outward change in the lives of individuals. Drunkards, harlots, thieves and others all changed their behaviour.

In one town, an angry crowd dragged several of John’s team before a magistrate. “What have the Methodists done?” the magistrate asked.

One of the ringleaders replied, “These people profess to be better than anybody else. They pray all the time, by day and by night.”

“Is that all they have done?”

“No, sir,” the man answered. “May it please your worship; they have converted my wife. Till she went with them, she had such a tongue! Now she is as quiet as a lamb.”

“Carry them back, carry them back,” the magistrate responded, “and let them convert all the scolds in town!”

The transformation of individual lives also led to the transformation of whole towns, villages and workplaces. John

described what happened in the factories of one town:

*“The whole scene was changed. In three of the factories, no more lewdness or profaneness was found; for God had put a new song in their mouth, and blasphemies were turned to praise...No trifling word was heard among them, and they watch over each other in love.”*

He described the transformation that had occurred in another town:

*“In this town there is a change indeed! It was wicked to a proverb: remarkable for Sabbath-breaking, cursing, swearing, drunkenness, and a general contempt of religion. But it is not so now. Open wickedness disappears; no oaths are heard, no drunkenness seen in the streets. And many have not only ceased from evil and learned to do well, but are witnesses of the inward kingdom of God, ‘righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.’”*

These powerful works of the Holy Spirit continued to follow and bless John’s ministry throughout his lifetime.

**Words of wisdom**

~ John Wesley ~

“No outward practices will stand in the place of the new birth. Nothing under heaven will stand in its place.”



## Consider it pure joy

“Pray for those who persecute you...” Matthew 5:44

As John and Charles travelled from town to town, they encountered intense opposition and persecution. Much of it was instigated by the officials of the church establishment who denounced John and his followers from their respectable pulpits. John wrote of his visit to Rochdale, Lancashire: “As soon as ever we entered the town, we found the streets lined on both sides with multitudes of people, shouting, cursing, blaspheming, and gnashing upon us with their teeth.” This was not a lone incident. Mob violence came upon John and his people wherever they went.

The mob in Rochdale threatened to tear him to pieces. John calmly called for a chair, took his stand, faced the crowd, and began to preach. He said of that encounter:

*“Suddenly the winds were hushed, and all was calm and still; my heart was filled with love; my eyes with tears; my mouth with arguments. The leaders were amazed; they were ashamed; they were melted down; they devoured every word.”*

God’s power so transformed hearts that, in the end, those who came to curse remained to pray.

An even more ferocious mob met John in Bolton. The

people of Rochdale seemed like lambs in comparison to the wild lions of Bolton! John calmly stood his ground, and again the power of God transformed the crowd. “Oh, how have a few hours changed the scene!” he later said. “We could now walk through every street of the town, and none molested or opened his mouth, unless to thank or bless us.”

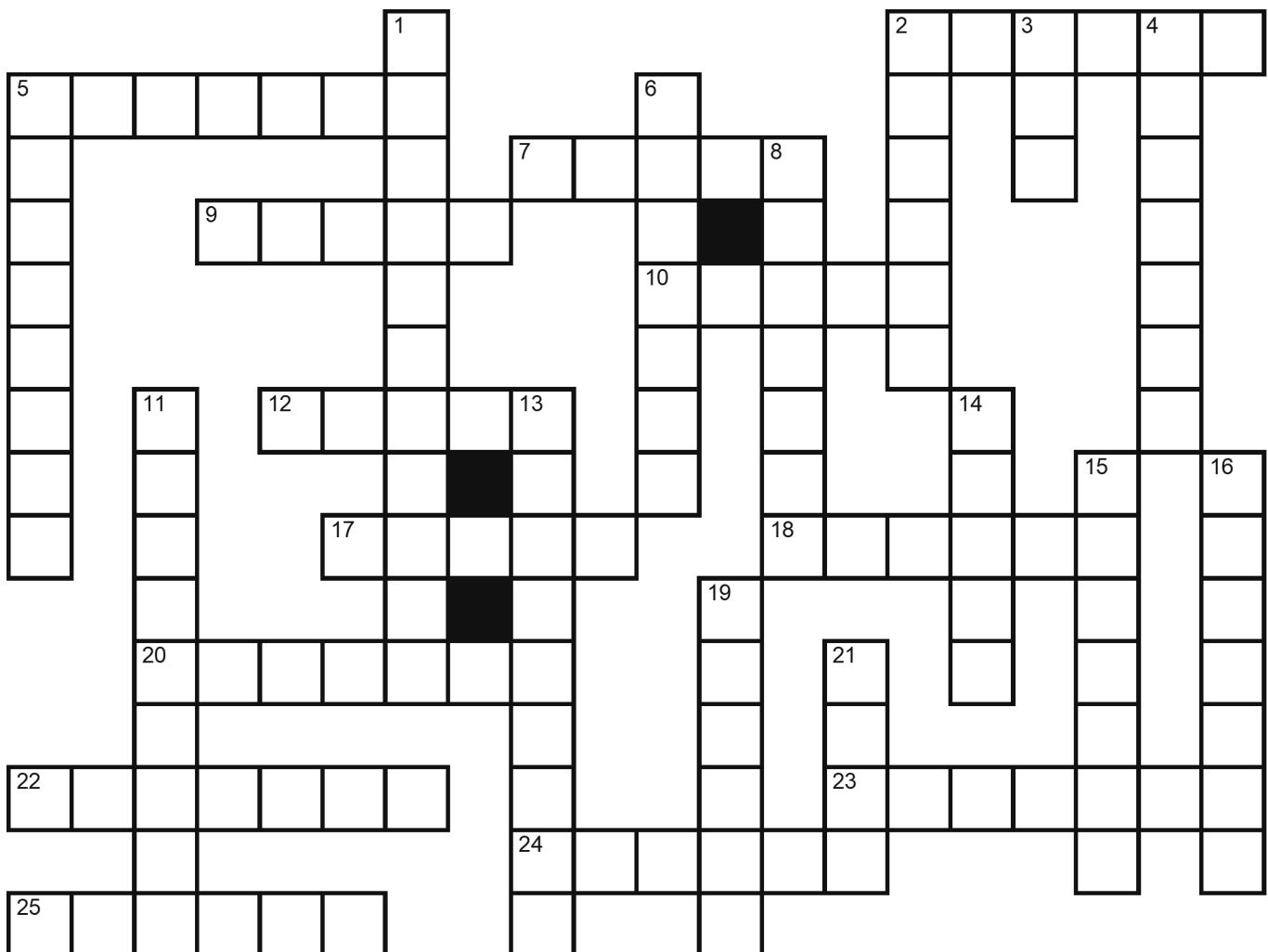


Opposition never deterred John from his calling. He wrote:

*“But in doing this we met with abundance of difficulty; we were assaulted and abused on every side. We were everywhere represented as mad dogs, and treated accordingly. We were stoned in the streets, and several times narrowly escaped with our lives. In sermons, newspapers, and pamphlets of all kinds, we were painted as unheard-of monsters. But this moved us not; we went on, by the help of God, testifying salvation by faith both to small and great, and not counting our lives dear unto ourselves, so we might finish our course with joy.”*

## CROSSWORD

The answers in this crossword puzzle relate to the life of John Wesley and can be found in this document.



## Across

- 2 John's surname. (6)
- 5 An extraordinary event manifesting divine intervention in human affairs. (7)
- 7 Confidence or trust in God. (5)
- 9 John Wesley's usual mode of transport. (5)
- 10 God's unmerited favour toward the unworthy. (5)
- 12 John Wesley was in the business of saving \_\_\_\_\_. (5)
- 17 Wesley often preached in one of these places. (5)
- 18 Mr Whitfield's first name. (6)
- 20 The first name of John's mother. (7)
- 22 John went to this state in America as a missionary. (7)
- 23 When God's power spiritually awakens many people. (7)
- 24 The city where John attended college. (6)
- 25 The first name of John's father. (6)

## Down

- 1 Oppression and harassment (John endured this). (11)
- 2 John's heart was "strangely \_\_\_\_\_" when he experienced the New Birth. (6)
- 3 Wrongdoing or transgression of God's law. (3)
- 4 The place where John was born. (7)
- 5 A member of a Protestant denomination founded in Saxony (John met many of them on his travels). (8)
- 6 The dominion of a king. (7)
- 8 Restoring to health by a miracle. (7)
- 11 This weather condition changed after prayer on multiple occasions. (9)
- 13 The act of being forgiven of our sins. (9)
- 14 Salvation from sin is also called the "New \_\_\_\_\_." (5)
- 15 To trust or have faith in Jesus is to \_\_\_\_\_ in him. (7)
- 16 John Wesley went to this college. (7)
- 19 The place where John Wesley died. (6)
- 21 The Bible is God's \_\_\_\_\_. (4)

## John Wesley Quotes

“In all cases, the Church is to be judged by the Scripture, not the Scripture by the Church.”



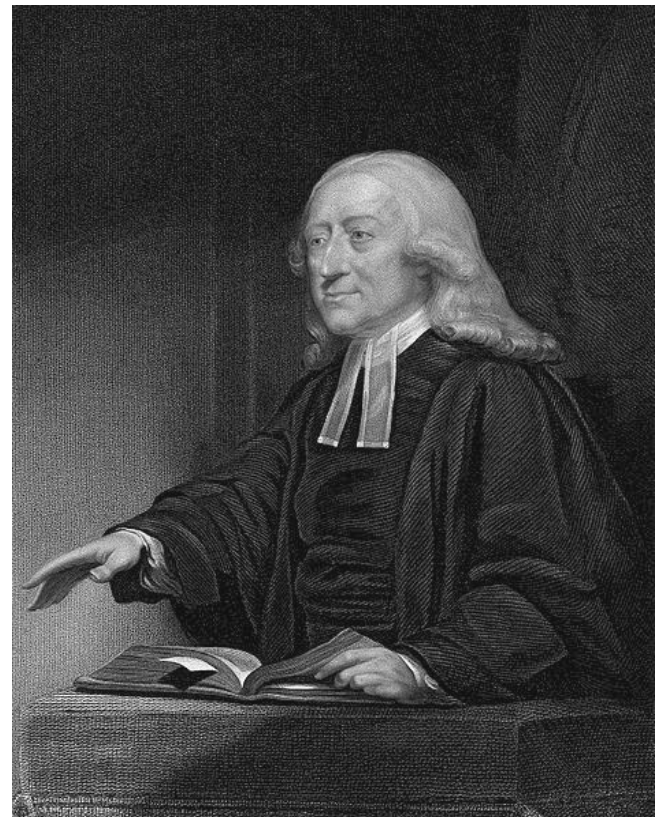
“We should be rigorous in judging ourselves and gracious in judging others.”



“Whosoever will reign with Christ in heaven, must have Christ reigning in him on earth.”

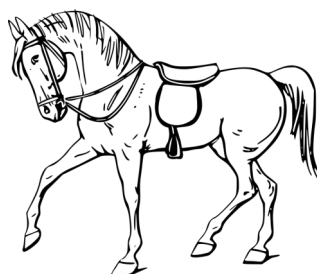


“Before I can preach love, mercy, and grace, I must preach sin, Law, and judgment. Preach 90% Law and 10% grace.”



John Wesley. Engraving by J. Thomson after J. Jackson. Public Domain.

“Do all the good you can,  
By all the means you can,  
In all the ways you can,  
In all the places you can,  
At all the times you can,  
To all the people you can,  
As long as ever you can.”  
~ John Wesley ~



Across: 2 Wesley, 5 Miracle, 7 Faith, 9 Horse, 10 Grace, 12 Souls, 17 Field, 18 George, 20 Susanna, 22 Georgia, 23 Revival, 24 Oxford, 25 Samuel.  
Down: 1 Persecution, 2 Warmed, 3 Sin, 4 Epworth, 5 Moravian, 6 Kingdom, 8 Healing, 11 Rainstorm, 13 Salvation, 14 Birth, 15 Believe, 16 Lincoln, 19 London, 21 Word.



## The power and presence of an Almighty God

# Signs will follow

“And these signs will accompany those who believe...they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.” Mark 16:17-18



It is clear from John's writings that powerful expressions of the Holy Spirit often occurred in his meetings and also in his personal life. He emphasised that through these outward manifestations, God was mightily working in people's hearts to convict them of sin and bring them to repentance and faith. These manifestations also occurred to strengthen and encourage people. They also enabled John to go forth in his ministry.

John's journals describe frequent accounts of people being healed and delivered from demonic power as a result of prayer. On several occasions, rainstorms stopped immediately in answer to prayer, allowing his meetings to continue. God also frequently healed John from fevers and pains.

A miracle occurred in the winter of 1742. After preaching in cold, frosty conditions, John and a co-worker, Mr Meyrick, both caught “violent colds.” John recovered quickly, but Mr Meyrick declined and took to his bed. Several days later, the doctor informed them that Mr Meyrick would not live until the morning. John recorded what happened next:

*“I went up, and found them all crying about him; his legs being cold, and (as it seemed) dead already. We all knelt down, and called upon God with strong cries and tears. He opened his eyes, and called for me; and, from that hour, he continued to recover his strength, till he was restored to perfect health.”*

Mr Meyrick went on to live for another twenty-eight years after this healing miracle.

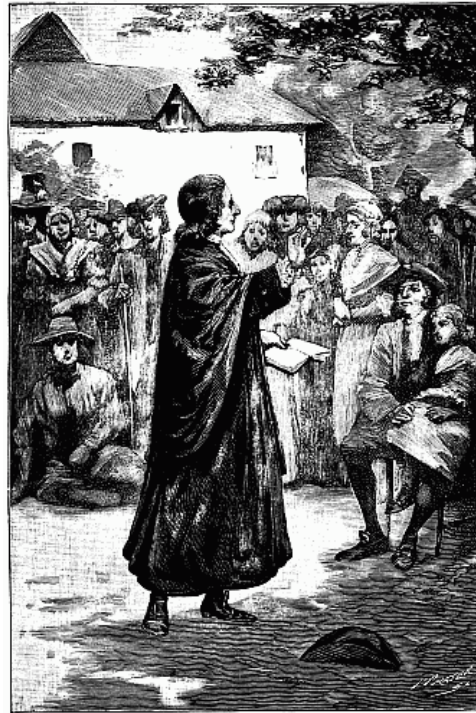
On another occasion, in 1746, John was riding between towns when both he and his horse became unwell. It seemed too difficult for them to continue. John suddenly thought to himself, “Cannot God heal either man or beast, by any means, or without any?” Immediately, John's weariness and headache ceased. In the same instant, his horse's lameness was healed.

John wrote about the outward manifestations of the Holy Spirit:

*“The danger was to regard extraordinary circumstances too much, such as outcries, convulsions, visions, trances; as if these were essential to the inward work, so that it could not go on without them. Perhaps the danger is, to regard them too little; to condemn them altogether; to imagine they had nothing of God in them, and were a hindrance to his work. Whereas the truth is:*

- 1. God suddenly and strongly convinced many that they were lost sinners; the natural consequence whereof were sudden outcries and strong bodily convulsions.*
- 2. To strengthen and encourage them that believed, and to make His work more apparent, He favoured several of them with divine dreams, others with trances and visions.*
- 3. In some of these instances, after a time, nature mixed with grace.*
- 4. Satan likewise mimicked this work of God in order to discredit the whole work; and yet it is not wise to give up this part any more than to give up the whole. At first, it was, doubtless, wholly from God. It is partly so at this day; and He will enable us to discern how far, in every case, the work is pure and where it mixes or degenerates.”*

John powerfully preached the truth of God's Word, but he also demonstrated Christian love through his charitable expressions to the poor. Miraculous signs followed. This combination of proclaiming God's Word, practical deeds of love, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, resulted in an incredible harvest for the Kingdom of God.



Kirlew. 1895. *The Story of John Wesley*. Public Domain.

“You have one business on earth - to save souls.”

“Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on Earth.”

John Wesley

### Further information about John Wesley

#### Recommended Reading:

Kirlew, M. (1895). [The Story of John Wesley](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/32669).  
www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/32669

<sup>1</sup>MacDonald, W. (1901). [The Young People's Wesley](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/39864). New York: Eaton & Mains. www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/39864

Pollock, J. (1989). *John Wesley*. Oxford, England: Lion Publishing.

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www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Wesley\_Journal.pdf

### Author Information

Sally Dixon is an Australian author, freelance writer and textile artist. Her aim is to bring hope, joy and beauty to imaginations.

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