



# One Page Sermon

## By Mark Swessinger

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## The Music of Methodism

Recap of sermon from June 16, 2024

Mark Swessinger

Charles Wesley was born to Samuel and Susanna Wesley on December 18, 1707. He was the 18th of 19 children, and one of nine who survived infancy. His father was an Anglican Priest, and a Tory politician. For those who don't know what a Tory is, it means that Papa Samuel was very conservative and against reformation either political, social or evangelical.

Charles was born into a family of clerics dating back several generations. Two of his older brothers also were Anglican priest, Samuel Junior and John. Charles was classically trained and excelled in school. He attended Westminster School where he was selected as a King's Scholar and served as head boy. Upon graduation, he attended Christs Church at Oxford University.

In 1727, Charles started a men's bible study group at Oxford. They studied the bible and led holy lives with a specific method in mind. Other students mocked them, calling them "The Holy Club" and "Methodists" because of their extremely detailed Bible study and disciplined lifestyles. Charles graduated from Oxford in 1732 with a masters degree in classical language and literature. In 1735, like his brothers and father before him, Charles took orders as an Anglican priest.

That same year the brothers set sail for America at the behest of Georgia governor James Oglethorpe, arriving in Savannah, Georgia. Charles was sent west to evangelize to a group of settlers with the title of Secretary of Indian Affairs, while John stayed in Savannah to establish a new parish. Neither brother was successful in their missions and a year later were dispatched to return to England.

On May 21, 1738, Charles had an Evangelical conversion, at St. Botolph church on Aldersgate in London. Three days later his older brother had his "Aldersgate experience" in which he described himself as being strangely warmed.

John wrote about his experience at great length in his journal. Charles put pen to paper to create one the great hymns of the church, "And Can it Be That I Should Gain."

This hymn serves as a manifesto of Charles Wesley and his transformation by the Holy Spirit, and his recognition of Christ's sacrifice given not just for the world, but for him personally.

It is an eruption of faith, from a soul that has been teth-

ered by doctrine and dogma, by rules and guilt, freed by the power of Christ's gift. Still inspired by his discovery, one year later, Charles returned to the theme and wrote a poem called "Glory to God, and Praise and Love," a seventeen stanza paean dedicated to his seminal moment.

In the Methodist church there are two very important books to help us understand how to worship. The first is the book of worship, which leads us through all the rituals, services, and rules for conduction worship as a United Methodist. The other is The United Methodist Hymnal which you have on your table or in your pews before you.

To my great disdain, we have moved away from using our hymnals on a regular basis. With the development of technology, we have turned from the intimacy of the printed musical page, to lyrics, spewed across a screen. Now, I may be old school, but I am never without my hymnal at church. It is a useful tool for me, and (don't tell anyone) probably gets more use than my bible. Truth be told, I have four working hymnals. One for hymn selection, one for worship, one at home, and a loose leaf edition used for copying when needs arise. Our hymnal is laced with a great list of hymns written by the Wesleys; Charles responsible for more than fifty.

While John moved further towards Methodism, Charles never left the Anglican church. He was proud of his Anglican heritage and often disagreed with his brother on practical church matters regarding commissioning of ministry and use of laity as preachers. Nonetheless, the founded a movement that we are part of today.

The Wesleys were interesting people. I truly like to believe that John felt that he had to have a little one upmanship on his younger brother. Charles, burned with a creative fire, to craft words to praise his God. Charles son, Samuel served as the organist at his father's church at St. Botolph, and was succeeded by his son, Samuel Sebastian, whose reputation as a musician grew so that he was called "the English Mozart".

As I said before, John Wesley gave us the mechanics of Methodism, he designed worship, set out the organization of the church, set our parameters, and charted our course.

But it was Charles who gave us the songs to sing on our journey, who lit the fire in our hearts with his lyrics, and spoke to God through his music.

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