



The Wesleys Take the Web: Discussion Questions

What do you think John Wesley meant when he said he was “submitting to be more vile”?

How did Methodism model new ways to take church outside the walls?

In 1739, John Wesley was contemplating an offer to continue his friend’s ministry of preaching outdoors. It seemed very strange that anyone would preach anyplace but in church. In the end, Wesley wrote in his journal, “I submitted to ‘be more vile’, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation.” Wesley began to preach where people were, a pre-social media version of going viral. In many ways, this was the beginning of the Methodist movement.

How is it helpful to think of the “world as my parish”?

In the video, John says, “the worldwide web is my parish,” a play on a quote from John Wesley himself. In the early days of the Methodist movement, many in the established church thought the Methodists were crossing lines, holding meetings in places where there was already an established church. Pretty soon, Wesley found himself unwelcome to preach in the parishes of the pastors of his day. Wesley responded by saying, “The world is my parish,” reinforcing his mission “to spread scriptural holiness across the land.”

What Methodist nicknames do you like best and why?

John and Charles Wesley’s small group at Oxford was not immediately recognized as the beginning of a revival. Instead, many of their fellow students looked upon them with suspicion, giving them names like Bible moths, Sacramentarians, and Supererogation Men (those who do far more than necessary). Others called them the Holy Club—the name historians use most often to describe that group at Oxford.

How might a method for following Jesus help one’s spiritual growth?

One of the names the other students called the Holy Club became one they embraced—Methodists. The Wesleys and their followers believed that a plan for spiritual growth would help

them grow in their faith. The General Rules of the early church encouraged Methodists to (1) do no harm, (2) do good, and (3) stay in love with God by going to church, reading our Bibles, praying, serving others, and standing up for justice.

Do you know the story of John Wesley being “plucked from the burning”? What other stories do you know about his early life?

A fire burned through the Wesley family home when John was five years old and his brother Charles was one. When the family gathered in the garden, they noticed John was missing. Through the quick thinking of some neighbors, he was pulled from an upstairs window “just as the room fell into [his room],” his mother Susanna reported in a letter. This experience of being “a brand plucked from the burning,” a reference to Zechariah 3:2, was influential to John throughout his life.

Who were some of the earliest influences on your life?

John and Charles’ digital assistance initially answers to the name Susanna. Susanna Wesley, John and Charles’s mom was an important spiritual influence in the lives of all her children. She gave each child special one-on-one time with her each week. At one point she held a small group meeting in the family home, possibly an early model John and Charles followed later—including having women serve as leaders.

What do you think when you see the cross and flame symbol?

Have you sung other Charles Wesley hymns? How is music important to you in your worship in church and at other times? What hymns/worship songs most inspire you?

Charles Wesley really did write more than 6,000 hymns, some of which we still sing. Some of the best known in addition to “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” and “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” are “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” “And Can it Be,” “And Are We Yet Alive,” “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus,” and “Love Divine All Loves Excelling.” Through his lyrics, Methodists began to sing what we believe—a tradition we continue today.

Do you know why saddlebags are important to the UMC? What do you know about circuit riders?

Methodism spread across England and later across the United States through Methodist preachers who spent a lot of time on horseback, carrying everything they needed in saddlebags. It has been estimated that John Wesley rode 250,000 miles on horseback during his lifetime.

Francis Asbury, leader of the Methodist Episcopal Church as it spread in the U.S., is said to have rode 300,000 miles. Asbury was so mobile that he never owned a home. He just rode from town to town sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How have you seen the work of the UMC in the world?

The United Methodist Church continues the early vision of John and Charles Wesley of following a method to help us grow in our faith. Those things we do to help people in need and to right wrongs in the world is part of this plan. Jesus told us that whatever we do for others, we also do for him. Our faith is not something we simply hold in our heart or mind, it is also something we live out every day.

What images would you share on social media to show what it means to be United Methodist?