3 Stages in the Rise of Methodism pre-1739

Oxford

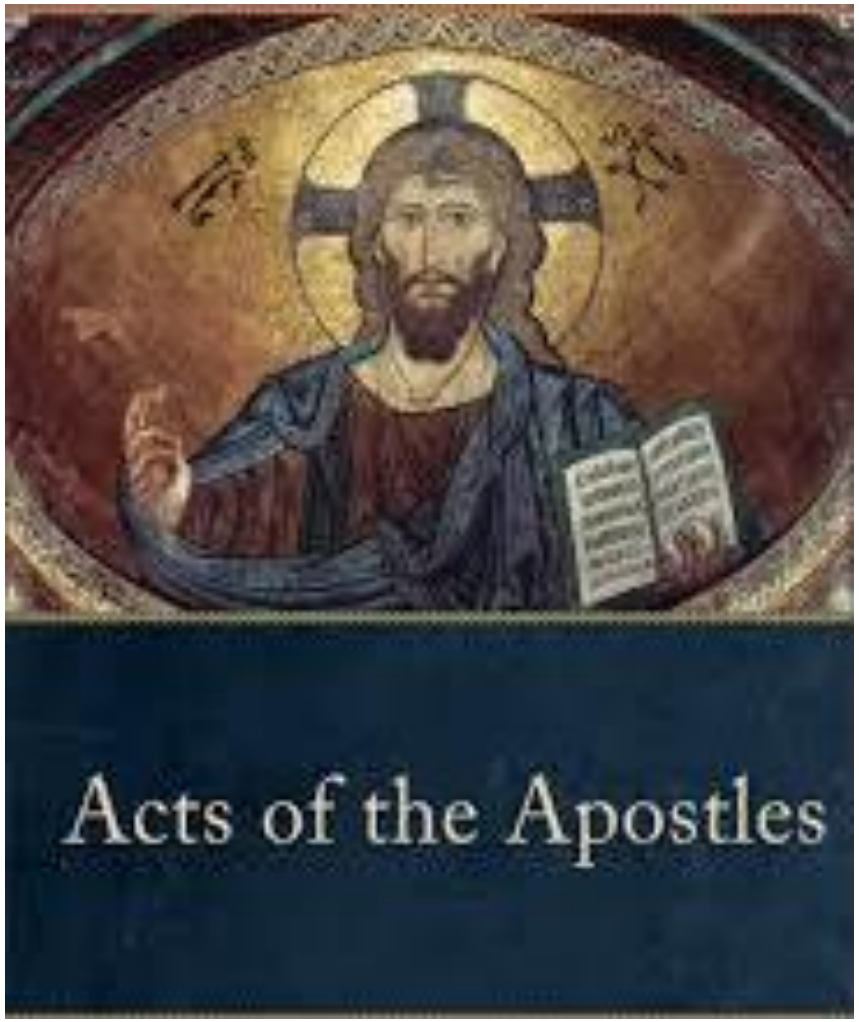
Georgia

London

Acts 2:42-47
Common English Bible

Community of believers

42 The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’
teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to
their prayers. 43 A sense of awe came over everyone. God
performed many wonders and signs through the
apostles. 44 All the believers were united and shared
everything. 45 They would sell pieces of property and
possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who
needed them. 46 Every day, they met together in the temple
and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and
simplicity. 47 They praised God and demonstrated God’s
goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the
community those who were being saved.

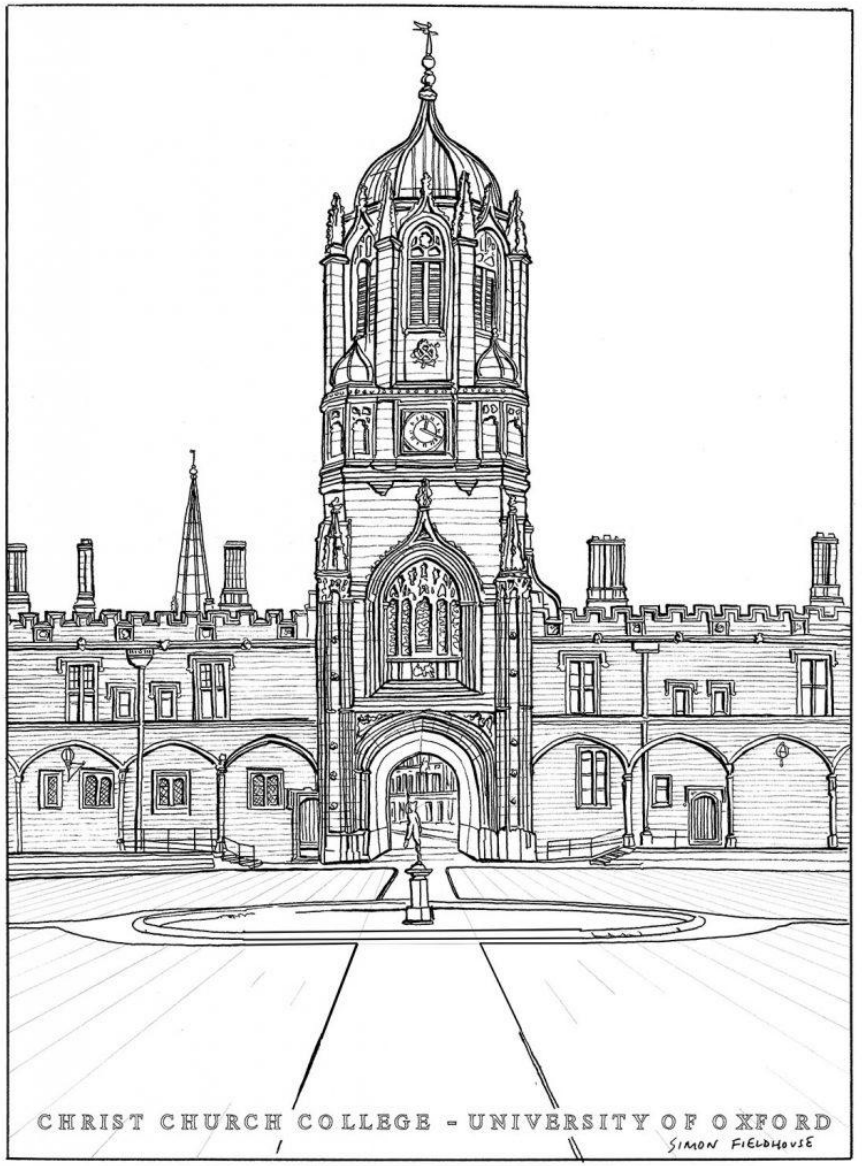


Stage 1
Oxford 1729-1735

Practical divinity

Via media: not too much emphasis on works (Papist); nor faith without works (radical Protestants); but use the means of grace in helping to have the mind that was in Christ and walk as he walked

First Rule of Holy Living: care of your time: keep a journal/diary
(JW influenced by Jeremy Taylor)

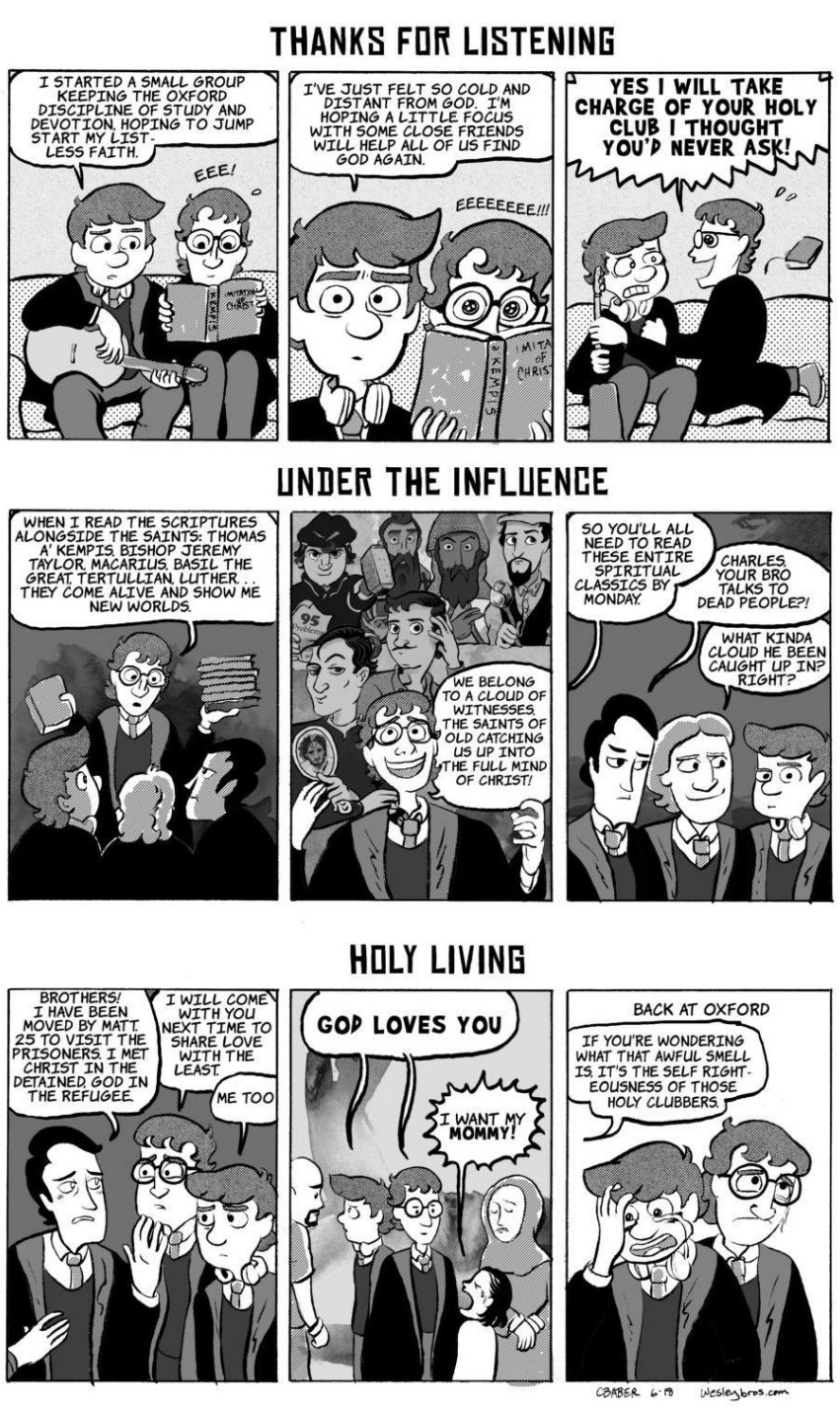


Holy Club

[*John Wesley and His Friends at Oxford*, Claxton, Marshall, 1813–1881, Photo credit: Salford Museum & Art Gallery]

John Wesley & the Order of the Oxford Methodists

https://um-insight.net/perspectives/john-wesley-the-order-of-the-oxford-methodists/



Reverend Charlie Baber

Pastor of Youth Ministry
cbaber@universityumc.church
Charlie Baber grew up in Cartersville, VA and was active in his rural United Methodist Church. After graduating from Gardner-Webb University, he pursued his calling to Youth Ministry at Central UMC, Shelby, and then Highland UMC, Raleigh, where he served for 8 years as youth minister and then 2 years as Associate Pastor. He came to University UMC to refocus his passion for youth ministry with the incredible students and volunteers in our Chapel Hill community. Charlie graduated from Duke Divinity School in 2010, and became an ordained Deacon in the VA Conference in 2013.

John Wesley & the Order of the Oxford Methodists

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In May 1729 Charles Wesley became friends with William Morgan, a like-minded serious student and a serious Christian. In the summer of 1729, John returned to Oxford for his Masters Degree and joined Charles and William in encouraging one another in their faith. With other peers, these young scholars weren't content to merely study together. They attended Communion, prayed, and fasted together. Other undergraduates called them names:

- the Reforming Club,
- the Godly Club,
- the Holy Club,
- Sacramentarians,
- Bible Moths,
- Bible Bigots,
- *Supererogation Men, *the performance of more work than duty requires. Works of supererogation - (in the Roman Catholic Church) actions believed to form a reserve fund of merit that can be drawn on by prayer in favor of sinners.

- *Enthusiasts *term used to discredit religious dissenters. Also used to describe people who were seen as dangerous or blind fanatics.

- —and, because of their methodical approach to the spiritual life, the name that eventually stuck: Methodists.

- May 1729: William Morgan became friends with Charles Wesley at Oxford ~ *relationship*
  https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/william-morgans-gift

- June 17, 1729: John Wesley returned to Oxford for 10 weeks ~ *leadership*

- November 1729: John joined with Charles, William, and Bob Kirkham to encourage one another in their faith ~ communal nurture of piety or *holy living*

- December/January 1729/1730: regular meetings begin ~ *accountability*

- August 1730: William Morgan urges the group visit the poor, the sick, and prisoners ~ *social holiness* misunderstood by peers as legalistic works-righteousness

- 1732 Richard Morgan, William's father, writes letter to William expressing displeasure with his son's actions ~ *criticism*

You can't conceive what a noise that ridiculous Society which you are engaged in has made here. Besides the particulars of the great follies of it at Oxford, which to my great concern I have often heard repeated, it gave me sensible trouble to hear that you were noted for your going into the villages about Holt, entering into poor people's houses, calling their children together, teaching them their prayers and catechism, and giving them a shilling at your departure.

I could not but advise with a wise, pious, and learned clergyman. He told me that he has known the worst of consequences follow from such blind zeal and plainly satisfied me that it was a thorough mistake of true piety and religion.

- June 1732: William Morgan battles illness, returns home to Ireland. John Clayton joins the society ~ expansion of leadership with long-lasting influence and widening circles, structure and organization

- August 26, 1732: William Morgan died at home in Dublin

- Richard Morgan thought the Wesleys' rigorous religious routine, which involved fasting as well as visiting the poor and prisoners, played a role in William's death. Richard Morgan wrote to Charles, "The Wesleys he raved of most of all in his sickness." https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/william-morgans-gift

- October 1732: John Wesley responds to Richard Morgan; *later publishing his letter to Richard. It became the first public defense of Methodism, including the prison ministry instituted by William Morgan.
  *for further review of Wesley's letter, see W. Pruitt at, http://historyofmethodism.com/episode-36.html

- December 1732: term "Methodist" widely recognized as the tag for the Wesleyan movement at Oxford

- 1733-35: expansion into societies into 8 colleges at Oxford

*Wilson Pruitt, a UMC Elder, in the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church has an extensive listing of sources and podcast episodes entitled “History of Methodism”. Information regarding the 3 stages of the rise of Methodism is my first use of Pruitt’s podcast.

http://www.historyofmethodism.com/about.html

Pruitt writes: …this project began as a purely audio medium, my citations and sources were not as strong as they could have been. All of the primary sources for the history of Methodism up to the early 20th century are in the public domain and many of them can be found online in various places. Here are some of the most important ones.

The principle guide for a Wesleyan understanding of English history is John Wesley's four volume *A Concise History of England*, published in 1776. Here are all four volumes and the periods that they cover

- Volume 1 - From Before the Roman Invasion to Richard II
- Volume 2 - From Henry IV to Elizabeth I
- Volume 3 - From Elizabeth I (cont.) to James II
- Volume 4 - From William III and Mary II to the death of King George II

The other principle source is the *Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, which originated in Oxford but is currently being published by Abingdon Press. In the transcripts, I cite volumes in this seri[ies of} Wesley's Works followed by the volume number and page number. The website, https://wesleyworks.ecdsdev.org/index.html is a great resource that links to all the published volumes, shows future volumes, and links to primary sources of John's that will not be included in the print publications.

The Wesley Center Online at North[west] Nazarene University, https://wesley.nnu.edu/, has a number of public domain works digitized, especially from the Thomas Jackson edition of Wesley's works. Most helpfully, it includes Wesley's A Christian Library, which was the largest publication venture of Wesley's life, as well as Wesley's Notes upon the Old and New Testaments.

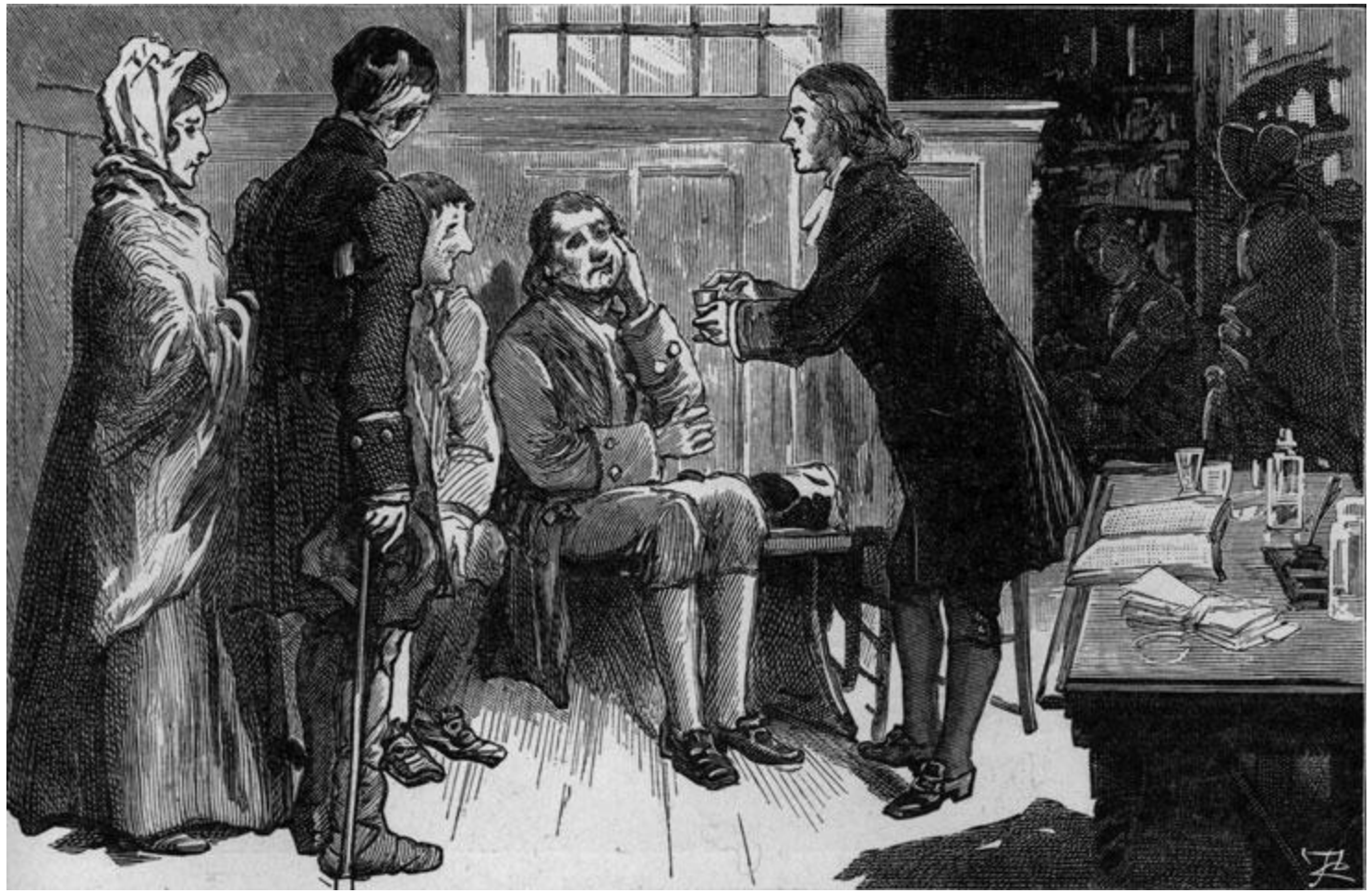
Excerpt from John Wesley's letter to Richard Morgan:

In November 1729, at which time I came to reside at Oxford, your son, my brother, myself, and one more, agreed to spend three or four evenings in a week together. Our design was to read over the classics, which we had before read in private, on common nights, and on Sunday some book in divinity.

In the summer following Mr. M[organ, i.e. William] told me he had called at the jail to see a man who was condemned for killing his wife, and that, from the talk he had with one of the debtors, he verily believed it would do much good if anyone would be at the pains of now and then speaking with them. This he so frequently repeated that on the 24th of August 1730, my brother and I walked with him to the Castle. [John continued to preach in the Castle prison at least once per month for the next four and a half years.]

We were so well satisfied with our conversation there that we agreed to go thither once or twice a week; which we had not done long before he desired me to go with him to see a poor woman in the town who was sick.

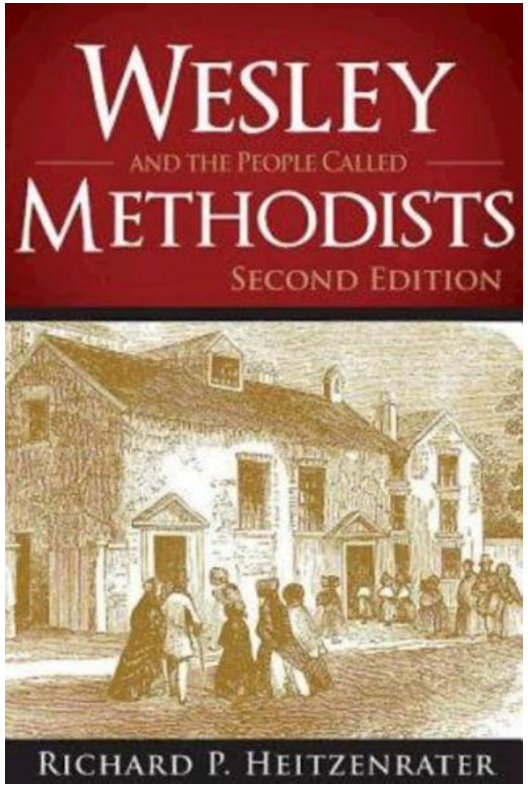
In this employment too, when we came to reflect upon it, we believed it would be worth while to spend an hour or two in a week, provided the minister of the parish in which any such person was were not against it.



“Wesley’s lifestyle (and that of the Oxford Methodists) was neither circumscribed by negative injunctions nor impelled primarily by a set of prescriptive rules. Their actions were guided by lists of questions for self-examination that were arranged according to the virtues for each day of the week:

love of God (Sunday),
love of neighbor (Monday),
humility (Tuesday),
mortification and self-denial (Wednesday and Friday),
resignation and meekness (Thursday),
and thanksgiving (Saturday).
The “one thing needful” was a soul renewed in the image of God. The main focus of the Oxford Methodist spirituality, then, was on an inward state of the soul that would be reflected in (and measured by) their Christian lifestyle.”

— Wesley and the People Called Methodists: Second Edition by Richard P. Heitzenrater
https://a.co/cxK5e0H



22 questions the members of John Wesley's Holy Club asked themselves every day in their private devotions over 200 years ago. https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/everyday-disciples-john-wesleys-22-questions

1. Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
2. Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate?
3. Do I confidentially pass on to another what was told to me in confidence?
4. Can I be trusted?
5. Am I a slave to dress, friends, work or habits?
6. Am I self-conscious, self-pitying or self-justifying?
7. Did the Bible live in me today?
8. Do I give it time to speak to me every day?
9. Am I enjoying prayer?
10. When did I last speak to someone else about my faith?
11. Do I pray about the money I spend?
12. Do I go to bed on time and get up on time?
13. Do I disobey God in anything?
14. Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?
15. Am I defeated in any part of my life?
16. Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy or distrustful?
17. How do I spend my spare time?
18. Am I proud?
19. Do I thank God that I am not like other people?
20. Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold a resentment toward or disregard?
21. Do I grumble or complain constantly?
22. Is Christ real to me?

Seal of the Georgia Trustees.

1732-1752

Stage 2
Georgia

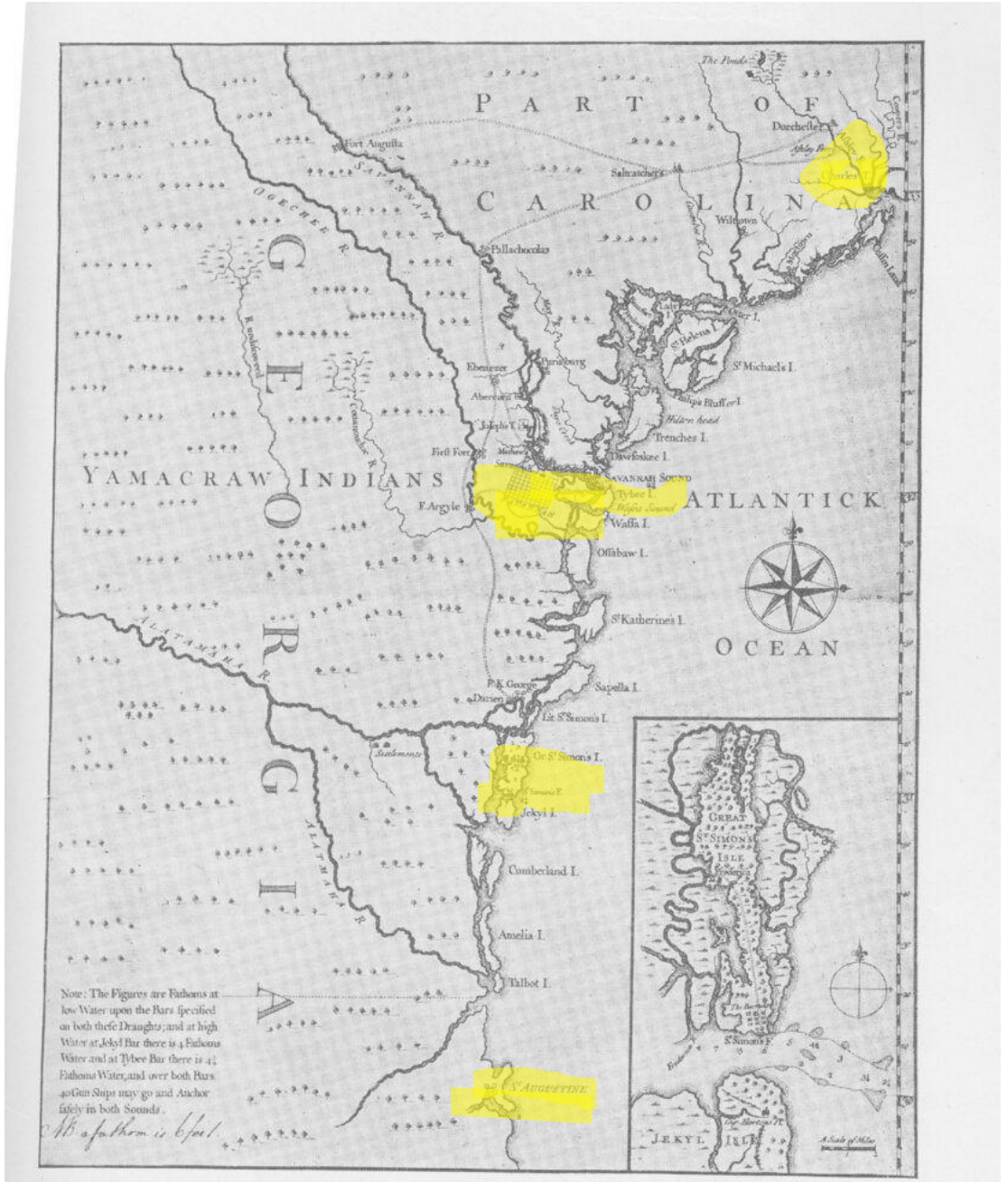
Seal of the Society for Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts

Tomochichi
Courtesy of Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.

Georgia 1736-1737

JW sought to be pastor to all: natives, European settlers - both free and indentured, and enslaved persons

“A parish of above 200 miles in length laughs at the labor of one man” (JW *Letters*, 25:474).



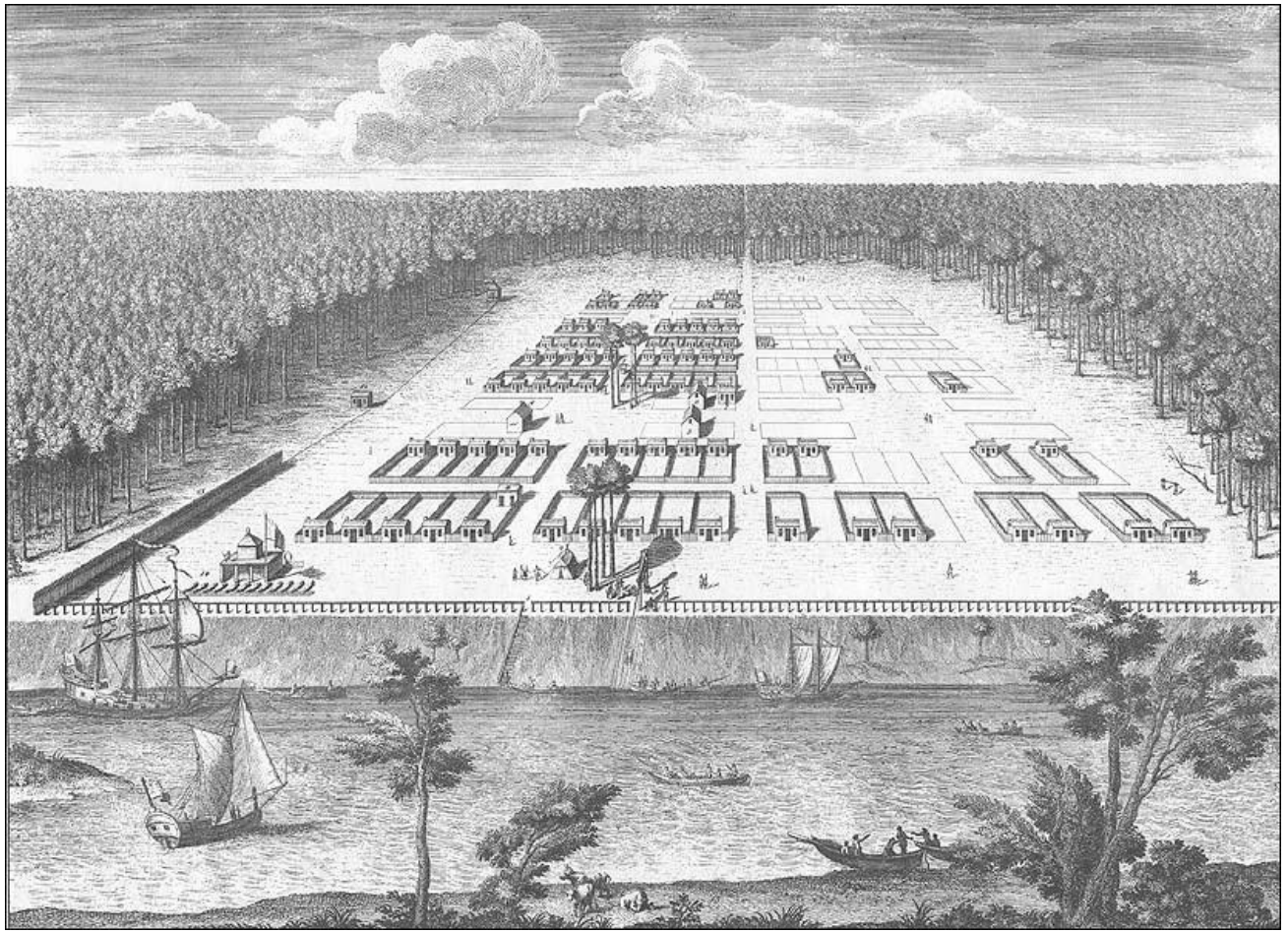
(Courtesy of Mr. W. W. DeRenne.)

MAP OF THE GEORGIA COAST, ETC.

Engraved Probably About 1745.

John Wesley Parish Priest
February 6, 1736 –
December 2, 1737

View of Savannah by Peter Gordon, 1734



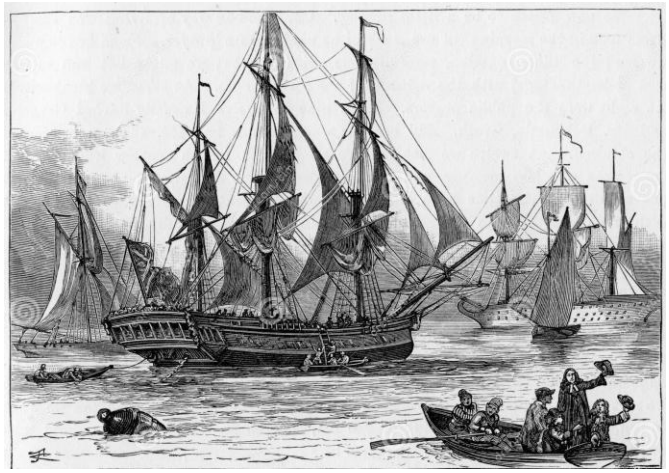
So that none would be without public worship and “in effect to be without God in the world” Wesley learned German, French, and Italian for Sunday prayer services

Sunday prayer service schedule for Savannah, 1737:

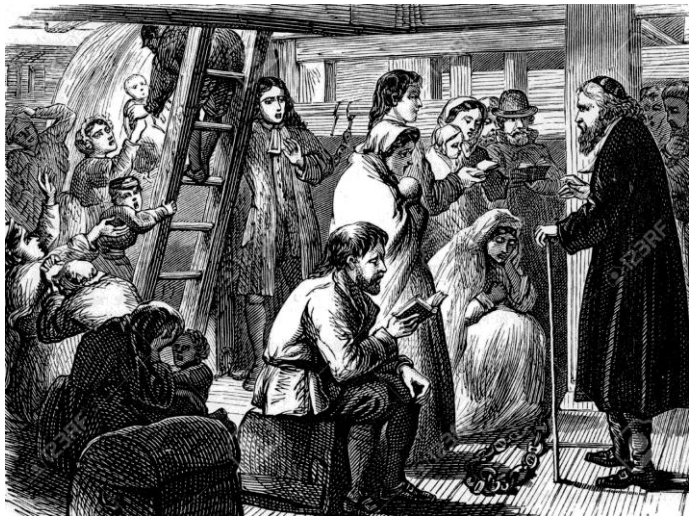
English at 5:00am, 10:30am, and 3:00pm
Italian at 9:00am
French at 1:00pm

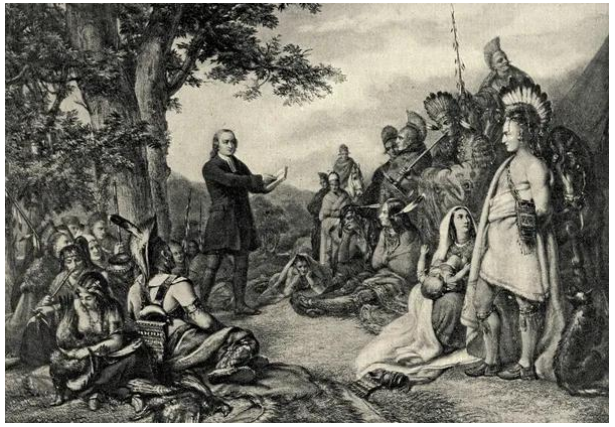
JW also learned Spanish for the benefit of the Spanish speaking Jews of Savannah

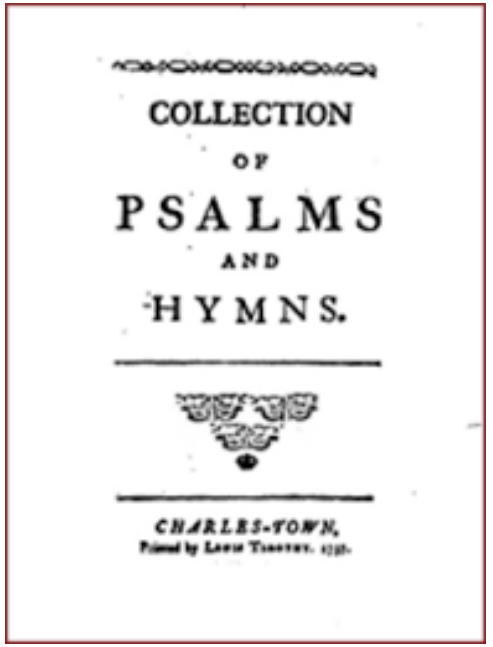
JW takeaways from the Georgia experience



- Refinement in Establishing Methodist societies
- Spiritual pilgrimage & theological development
- Moravian exposure
- Concept of the church in mission to the world, cross-racial, cross-cultural, ecumenical & interfaith interaction
- Publication of *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns*, Charles-Town 1737







- Stage 3

London 1738

Upon Return from Georgia JW's attention focused upon the Practical & Spiritual:

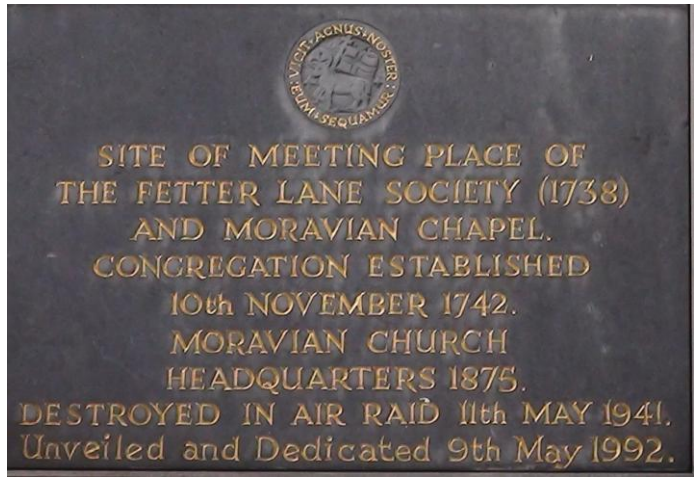
Practical

- Georgia Trustees
- Old friends regarding Oxford and London "Methodists" i.e. James & John Hutton
- Active in new groups
- Making new friendships
- German Moravians ~ i.e. Peter Böhler

Spiritual concerns:

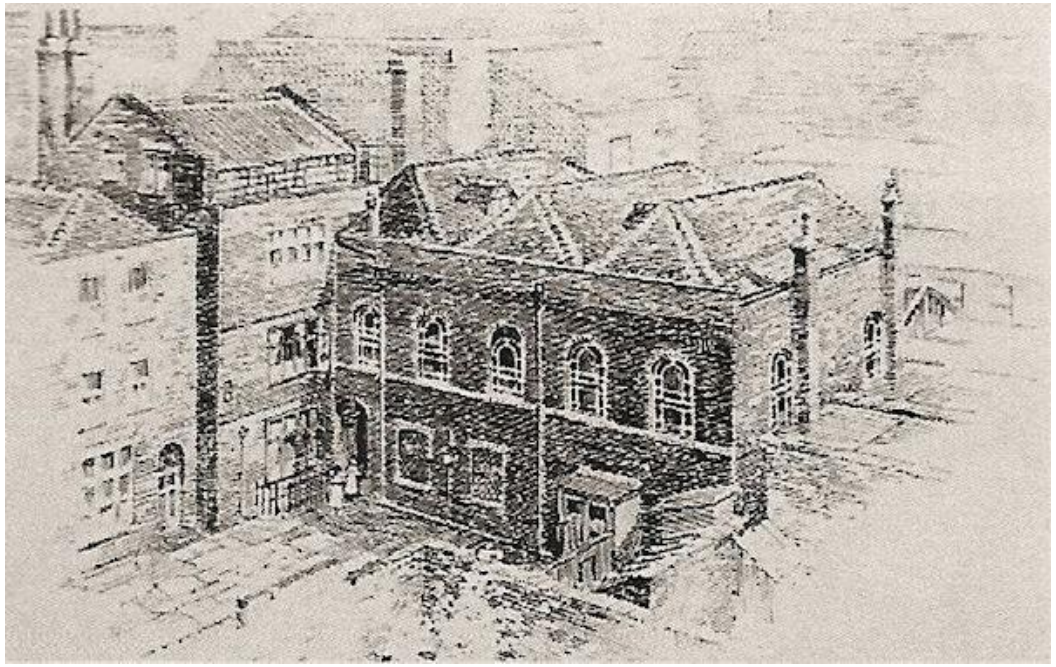
- Moravian "heart" theology
- Lack of assurance of faith
- "Degrees" of faith
- Salvation by faith alone
- Instantaneous conversion

On May 1, 1738, **Peter Böhler**, Wesley's new Moravian mentor, invited several persons "who were of the same mind and who seek closer fellowship with each other" to organize a band. A small group of persons gathered at the home of John Hutton, (including Hutton and JW, who had unexpectedly returned to London that day to visit his ill brother Charles at Hutton's). The group sought to organize and accepted two rules, by which a small society was established:



1. That they will meet together once in a week to confess their faults one to another and to pray for one another that they may be healed [cf. James 5:16].
2. That any others, of whose sincerity they are well assured, may, if they desire it, meet with them for that purpose.

These simple rules provided the original framework for the group that soon became known as the **Fetter Lane Society**, whose organization Wesley would later call "**the third rise of Methodism.**"



Peter Böhler departed for America on May 4, 1738. He left a moving letter for John

I love you greatly, and think much of you in my journey, wishing and praying that the tender mercies of Jesus Christ the crucified…may be manifested to your soul : that you may taste and then see, how exceedingly the Son of God has loved you, and loves you still; and that so you may continually trust in him, and feel his life in yourself. Beware of the sin of unbelief; and if you have not conquered it yet, see that you conquer it this very day, through the blood of Jesus Christ. Delay not, I beseech you, to believe in your Jesus Christ ; but so put him in mind of his promises to poor sinners, that he may not be able to refrain from doing for you, what he hath done for so many others.

http://www.historyofmethodism.com/episode-47.html

Peter Böhler After Aldersgate
https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fstatic1.squarespace.com%2Fstatic%2F5e4472037a27d41763152ccf%2Ft%2F63598fc038df077c07aab055%2F1666813902075%2F4%2BPeter%2BBohler%2BAfter%2BAldergate.pdf&psig=AOvVaw0h4umjCuQZnqpSy5YMtxZB&ust=1743100730199000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CBcQjhxqFwoTCLDe7beyqIwDFQAAAAAdAAAAABAE

On May 14, JW wrote to **William Law**, the English theologian who had written *A Practicale Treatise upon Christian Perfection*. Law influenced JW before the Georgia excursion. As much as anything, **this letter points to John's pre-Aldersgate theological understanding**:

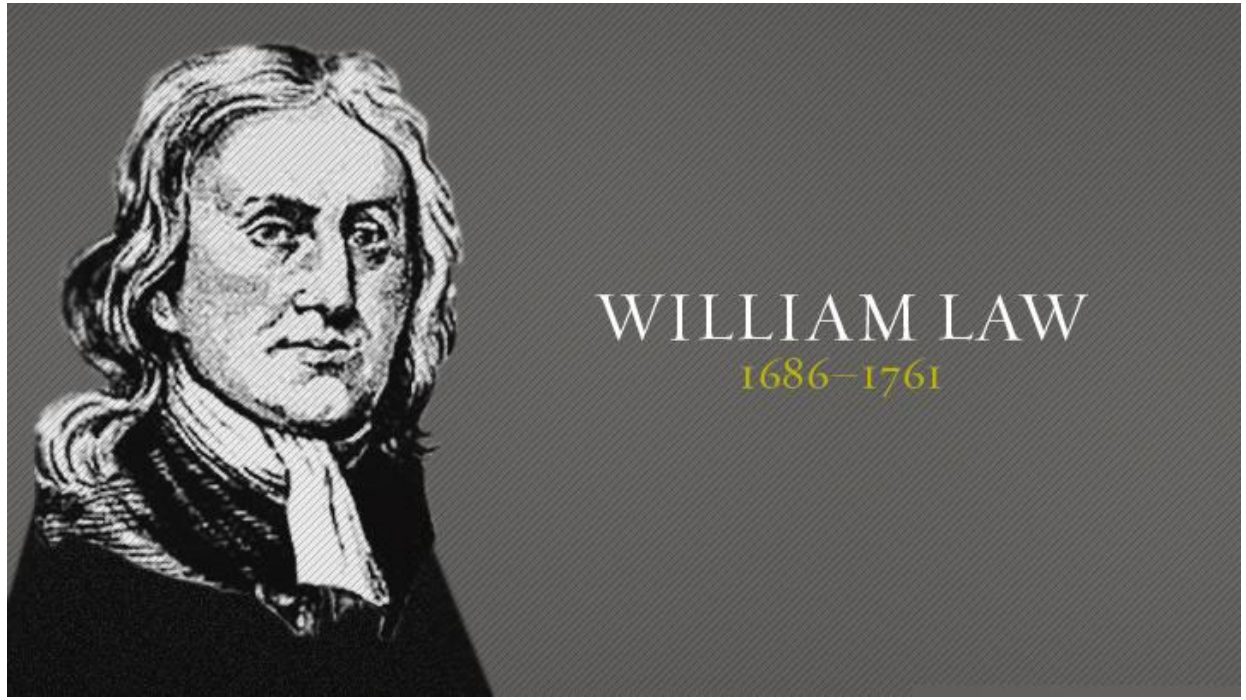
For two years (more especially) I have been preaching after the model of your two practical treatises; and all that heard allowed, that the law is great, wonderful, and holy. But no sooner did they attempt to follow it than they found that it is too high for man, and that by doing the work of this law should no flesh living be justified …

*Under this heavy yoke I might have groaned till death had not *an holy man to whom God lately directed me, upon my complaining thereof, answered at once:*

'Believe, and thou shalt be saved. Believe in the Lord Jesus with all thy heart, and nothing shall be impossible to thee. This faith, as well as the salvation it brings, is the free gift of God. But seek, and thou shalt find. Strip thyself naked of thy own works, and thy own righteousness and fly to him …'

Now, sir, suffer me to ask, How you will answer it to our common Lord, that you never gave me this advice? … Why did I scarce ever hear you name the name of Christ? Never, so as to ground anything upon faith in this blood? … I know I had no faith. Unless the faith of a devil, the faith of a Judas, that speculative, notional, airy shadow which lives in the head, not in the heart. But what is this to the living faith in the blood of Jesus? The faith that cleanseth from all sin …

I beseech you, sir, by mercies of God, to consider deeply and impartially whether the true reason of your never pressing this upon me was not this, that you had it not yourself?



**an holy man*
Peter Böhler

https://www.penn.museum/sites/journal/7087/

Old House in Neville Court, Fetter Lane, that escaped the Great Fire, gives a period picture for the place that became known as the **Fetter Lane Society**, whose organization Wesley would later call "**the third rise of Methodism.**"

The Fetter Lane Society consisted of people well-disposed toward Methodist and Moravian viewpoints, neither of which required separation from the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England. WPCM

The society's agenda was soteriological – the spiritual health - the salvation (*salus* ~ Latin for safety, salvation, welfare) of the participants. WPCM

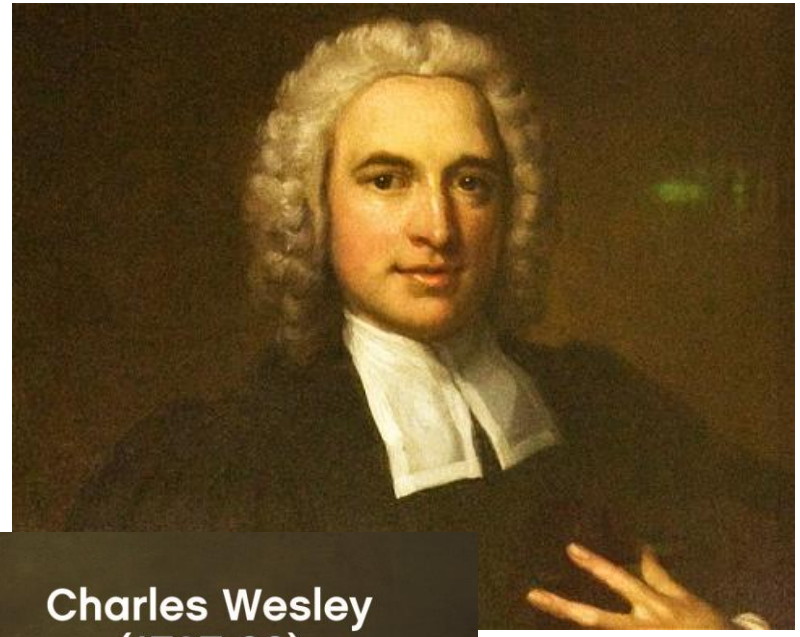
The **Fetter Lane Society** was the first flowering of the Moravian Church in Britain, and an important precursor to Methodism. It was founded in 1738. Although the original meeting house was destroyed in the mid-20th century, the society still meets in London and is part of the British Province of the Moravian Church.

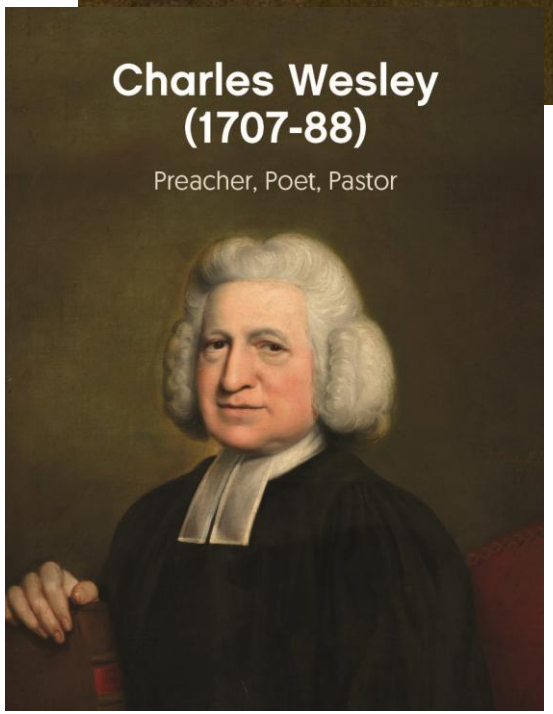
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fetter_Lane_Society

The society's house became the first Moravian chapel in Britain and was officially registered in 1742. John and Charles Wesley were inspired by the experiences they shared with the Moravians and met with the Fetter Lane society frequently throughout 1738.
https://www.methodistheritage.org.uk/visit/fetter-lane-chapel/

In May 1738, several members of the society, including **Charles Wesley**, experienced the assurance of faith.

Charles, while sick in bed on Pentecost Sunday, May 21,1738 described his experience as "*a strange palpitation of heart*" after which he proclaimed, "*I believe, I believe*!" and was at peace with God. (*CWJ, 1:106-8*)
see also,
https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/blog/may-21-1738-charles-wesleys-experience-of-assurance





And Can It Be that I Should Gain **UMH #363**

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me!

John visited Charles on May 22. Charles prayed for John who was still struggling with a lack of assurance. John wrote in his journal that week that he was in a state of sorrow and heaviness of heart. The Pentecost season heightened his desire to experience the witness of the Holy Spirit, but he remained anxious. His anxiety was increased by the testimonies of the friends who had experienced assurance.

ALDERSGATE WARD
with its DIVISIONS *into*
Precincts *and* Parishes
And the Liberty of S.t Martins le Grand, according to a
NEW SURVEY.

PART OF CRIPPLEGATE WARD
WITHIN AND WITHOUT

The Arms of William Benn Esq.r

PART OF THE LIBERTY OF GLASS HOUSE YARD.

PART OF FARINGDON WARD WITHIN.

PART OF FARINGDON WARD WITHOUT.

The Parish Church of S.t Anne Within Alders-Gate

The North East prospect of the Church of S.t Botolph Without Alders-Gate Built in the Year 1754.

A Scale of Feet.
100 200 300 400

R. Cole sculp.

This Plan is most humbly inscribed to WILLIAM BENN Esq.r Alderman of Alderfgate Ward in 1754.

London Mapmakers of the Eighteenth Century

https://laurenceworms.wordpress.com/2022/07/28/fixing-the-map-trade-the-london-of-the-london-mapmakers-of-the-eighteenth-century/

On May 24th John read scripture in the morning, heard the anthem at St Paul's Church in the afternoon, and then attended the society meeting later in the day after the church bells rang to announce the birth of George III.

John Wesley's assurance converted his understanding of the way of salvation. **His experience of assurance of salvation helped him understand that he had it backwards.** We are saved by grace through faith! Salvation is God's free gift of love. Christ crucified and risen has done all the work on our behalf. He alone makes us acceptable to God and restores relationship with the Father. He alone gives us the gift of faith that equips us to then live as a child of God.
https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/blog/i-felt-i-did-trust-in-christ-christ-alone-for-salvation

John wrote:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before 9, 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 me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.*** (J&D, 18:249-50)

"Where Shall My Wondering Soul Begin?" **UMH #342**

Where shall my wondering soul begin?
How shall I all to heaven aspire?
A slave redeemed from death and sin,
a brand plucked from eternal fire,
how shall I equal triumphs raise,
or sing my great deliverer's praise?

This is generally thought to be part of the 8-verse hymn which Charles Wesley wrote shortly after his conversion, perhaps the one intended in the comment on the conversion of his brother [John] on May 24th, 1738:

"Towards 10, my brother was brought in triumph by a troop of our friends,
and declared, 'I believe.' We sang the hymn with great joy, and parted with prayer."

See also: Holy Spirit moments:
Learning from Wesley at Aldersgate
By Joe Iovino

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