



How Firm Is Your Foundation?

Text: Don Adams. Top 10 United Methodist Beliefs. Abingdon Press.

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These notes can be found at: <https://davidbissette.com>

Part one: Awakenings and John Wesley (Intro and Chapter 1)

We're here to take a look at Methodists beliefs—*which can sound a little dry*. Luckily, it isn't! For one thing, we can't accomplish our goal without taking a look at John Wesley, who was an amazing person. It's not that what Wesley taught is unique in Christianity—Methodism is not a cult. It's just that Wesley taught the basics of Christianity so well and lived them out thoroughly in his life. He was also so effective at helping others to do the same. He spoke with clarity and passion, and his compassion for others was as palpable as his works were visible.

But, what happened during his life wasn't just because Wesley was such an amazing person. God was doing something on a bigger scale in the world during his lifetime that helps to explain the success of his ministry.



Awakenings: the context for our study

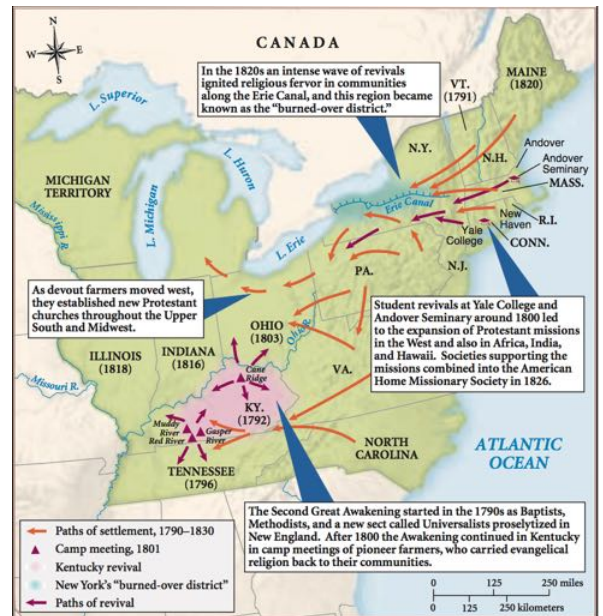
- **Awakenings, revivals, resurgences, outpourings of the Holy Spirit**

- Often worldwide in scope
- Involved multiple denominations in existence, started others
- Social effects are dramatic: courts had no one to try for crimes, abolition of slavery promoted, schools, hospitals, care for poor

- **A striking example—The *Second* Great Awakening**

- J. Edwin Orr is a great source of information (<https://jedwinorr.com/resources/articles/prayandrevival.pdf>)
- After American Revolution (starting 1781): “moral slump” in the U.S.
 - Out of a population of five million, 300,000 were confirmed “drunkards”
 - Profanity was of the “most shocking kind”.
 - First time in the history of the American settlement, women were afraid to go out at night for fear of assault.
 - Bank robberies were a daily occurrence.
 - Methodists losing more members than they were gaining.
 - Baptists said that they had their most wintry season.
 - Presbyterians in general assembly deplored the nation's ungodliness.
 - In a typical Congregational church in Lennox, Massachusetts, the minister did not take one young person into fellowship for 16 years.
 - The Lutherans were so languishing that they discussed uniting with Episcopalians who were even worse off.
 - The Protestant Episcopal Bishop of New York decided he was out of work, so he took up other employment.
 - The Chief Justice of the United States, John Marshall, wrote to the Bishop of Virginia, James Madison, that the Church 'was too far gone ever to be redeemed.'
 - Voltaire averred and Tom Paine echoed, “Christianity will be forgotten in thirty years.”
 - Harvard - poll found no believers in the whole student body.
 - Princeton, a much more evangelical place - poll found two believers in the student body, and only five that did not belong to the “filthy speech movement” of that day.
 - Mock communion at Williams College, and they put on anti-Christian plays at Dartmouth. They burned down the Nassau Hall (which once served as the U.S. capitol) at Princeton. They forced the resignation of the president of Harvard. They took a Bible from a local Presbyterian church in New Jersey and burned it in a public bonfire. Christians were so few on campus in the 1790's that they met in secret, like a communist cell, and kept their minutes in code so that no one would know.

- Awakening began in England, Europe, then US, and South Africa. Church membership grew tremendously, with a focus on personal commitment to Christ. This awakening is usually described as most closely associated with the US.
- Results included a momentum to abolish slavery and promote popular education, improvements in women's rights, prison reform, and care for the handicapped and mentally ill. Bible Societies were created to promote the reading of Scripture, and Sunday Schools and many secular social benefits accompanied the evangelistic drive.



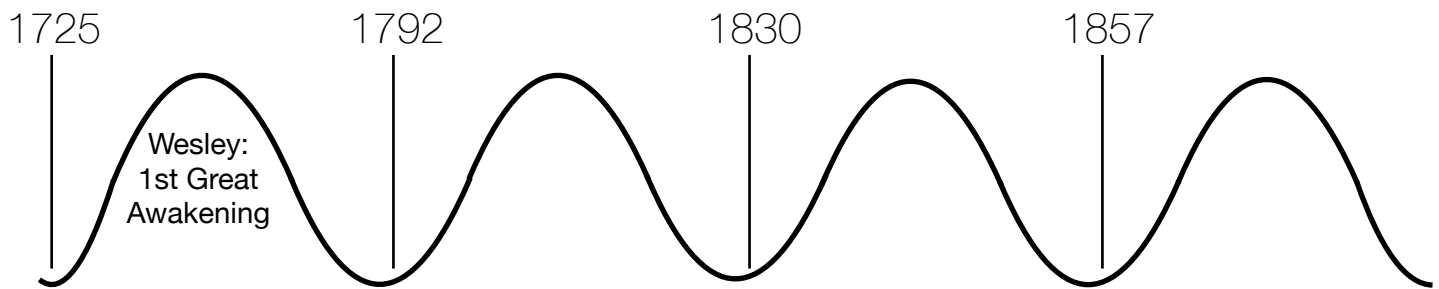
Sample list from 18th to 20th century

• 1725 onward—The First Great Awakening

- Included Germany, Britain, then to the colonies
- John Wesley, "Holy Club", "enthusiasts", "methodists", George Whitefield
- Whitefield convinced Wesley to preach outdoors...which was unheard of
- Violent opposition arose. At times Wesley barely escaped with his life.
- 10% of population of New England (30k of 300k) joined churches in two years
- Six universities came out of this movement: Brown, Columbia, Dartmouth, U of Pennsylvania, Princeton, and Rutgers.
- Pres. Calvin Coolidge in paying tribute to Francis Asbury: "America was born in a Revival of Religion", observing that John Wesley and George Whitefield were the back of it. Asbury was an early abolitionist.
- In England secular historian Sir Charles Robertson wrote: "Methodism and the French Revolution are the two most tremendous phenomena of the century."



- **1792 onward—The Second Great Awakening** (discussed above)
- **1830 onward**
 - A resurgence of the previous awakening/revival that lasted about 12 years
 - Methodist Episcopal Church in US doubled membership in 2 years
 - North and South Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, Polynesia, Hawaii, and South Africa all were affected
 - Charles Finney was known for his effectiveness in the U.S. as a minister and speaker, and spoke boldly against slavery and refused communion to slaveholders.
 - Significant social betterment also resulted (hospitals, orphanages, “asylums”, YMCA, etc.)
- **1857, 1882, 1904, Between WW I & WW II, 1948, 1960’s-80’s (“Jesus Movement”)**



plus 1882, 1904, Between WW I & WW II, 1948, 1960’s-80’s, ??

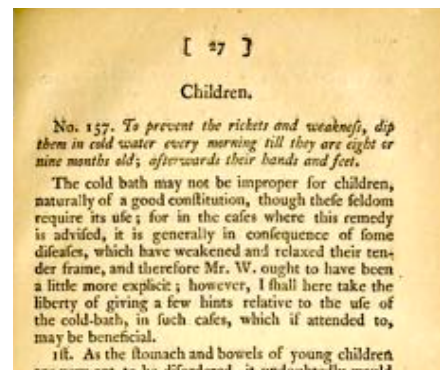
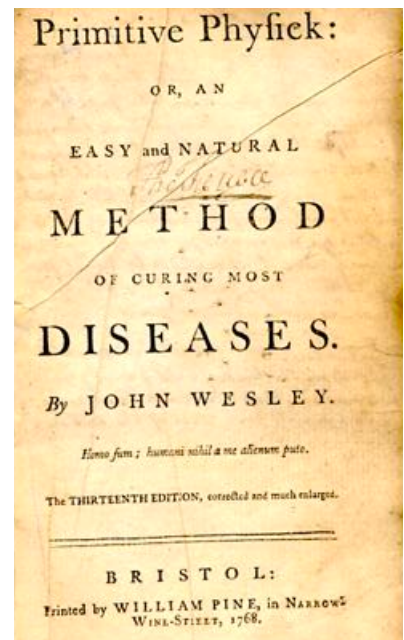
The above chart is not to “scale” in that the time periods for these awakenings/revivals are not so evenly spaced, and their intensity varied.

John Wesley 1703-1791

Up to age 10	<p>15th child of Susanna and Samuel Wesley (Oxford grad, poet, minister). Susanna was 25th child of her parents and bore 19 children (9 lived past infancy). John and all his siblings were taught to read as soon as they could walk. Expected to be proficient in Latin and Greek and to memorize major portions of New Testament. Mom interviewed each of them each day for spiritual instruction.</p>	
11-20	At age 11 went to school in London, then to Oxford U like his father.	
21-30	<p>Stayed on to get his Masters, and taught at Lincoln College at Oxford. Afterwards served two years as a parish priest to assist his father. He eventually returned to Oxford to teach. His brother, now a student at Oxford, had started the “Holy Club” as other students called them. When Wesley returned he led the club, known for its prayer and twice-weekly fasting. They were also called “enthusiasts” (think fanatics) and eventually “methodists” because of their regular practices.</p>	
31-40	<p>He journeyed to Savannah, GA to be a minister there. During a huge storm he was deeply affected by a group of Moravians on the ship who calmly sang hymns and prayed during the storm. Upon arriving he led a group of Christian “societies”, as they were called, for two years. He fell in love, but felt he should not be married at that time, and he handled it badly after his romantic interest married another man. He left the church in the midst of the ensuing conflict and returned to England depressed.</p> <p>He attended Moravian meetings there and on May 24, 1738 (almost 35 yrs old), at a meeting on Aldersgate St., he felt his heart “strangely warmed” while listening to someone read Martin Luther’s preface to Romans. Known as the “Aldersgate experience”, it was a turning point for him in which he felt a spiritual freedom of “salvation by faith alone.”</p> <p>He then went to Germany to study with the Moravians for a while. Upon his return George Whitfield, a friend from Oxford, invited him to speak outdoors...something which to Wesley was almost heresy. Wesley eventually agreed, and his broader ministry was launched. He eventually broke with the Moravians and began the Methodist Society. Much persecution followed from fellow Anglicans because of his use of lay ministers. Wesley organized his fellow worshippers in his usual methodical way.</p>	
41-50	<p>Wesley participated in building the Methodist church, though he still considered himself to be carrying out his ministry as part of the Church of England. As you may have guessed by now, he was methodical in his actions. He attempted to provide a pathway for people to grow spiritually via a variety of methods, including teaching, small groups, and encouraging others to engage in charitable actions.</p>	
51-60		
61-70		
71-80		
81-87	<p>Wesley died at the age of 87. Because of his charitable work he died poor. His church at that time had 135,000 members and 541 itinerant preachers. Today the Methodist church has 75 million adherents in 130 countries.</p>	

A few additional notes about Wesley's life

- When young John was not yet six years old a fire broke out in the rectory at Epworth, possibly set by one of his father's enemies in the parish. John was rescued when one neighbor stood on the other's shoulders and pulled him through the window seconds before the roof crashed. Wesley often referred to himself as a "brand plucked out of the fire" (Zech 3:2).
- It is said that he rode 250,000 miles on horseback to give more than 40,000 evangelistic sermons. He organized the teaching of new Christians, eventually starting churches through a network of itinerant preachers
- He wrote, edited, or abridged some 400 books on theology, music, physics, medicine for the everyday person (32 editions), marriage, abolitionism, and politics.
- He spoke 8 languages, and wrote grammars in 6 of them.
- His library included more than 1,400 authors
- He was a supporter for an active role of women in the church, including public speaking and teaching
- He married unhappily at age 48 to a widow, Mary Vazeille. She left him 15 years later—saying that he was too busy building a church to have time for her.
- One of his most famous sayings is: "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." However, an actual quote of it by him from his times cannot be found.



Discussion

- Questions about the material
- Watch surprised you most?
- What was most helpful?

Homework

- Read Intro and Beliefs 1 & 2 This is an unusual amount of reading, but worth it.
- Read over notes from today's class. (<https://davidbissette.com>) Look at the additional material if interested. The video by Adam Hamilton is about 10 minutes.
- Pray once per day (upon rising?) for our class and for the thing you most want to get out of it. Consider it an experiment.