



Wesley's Wise Words

**A Messy Church session
about John Wesley**



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Wesley's Wise Words Messy Church session

Reflection (for Messy Church Leaders)

John Wesley, now known as the founder of the Methodist Church, never intended to start a new denomination. John was an Anglican priest who wanted to tell people outside the church about the good news of Christ. I originally wrote this session for our Methodist Messy Church because many people attending had never heard the story of our inspirational founder. I have grown up with Wesley's story but it is only in writing this session that I have realised how relevant John's life and words are for our Christian journey today, whatever our denomination!

It starts with the example of John's mother, Suzannah. She realised it was important to share her Christian faith with her children and to spend time with each child individually. Today, research informs us that children who experience faith at home are more likely to follow this into teenage years (Sticky Faith) and child psychologists tell us how important it is to spend time with our children.

John Wesley's followers met in 'Classes' or small groups. He was wise enough to recognise then what we now know to be true: that meeting in small groups who 'watch over each other in love' is one of the best ways to grow our faith. John's trust of women to lead some of his groups was also very forward-thinking for his day. I wonder how much his experience of his mother influenced his thinking.

John Wesley was particularly concerned about inviting people to experience God's grace and love. His methods of disciplined Christian living with Bible study and prayer are an example for us all today. His emphasis was on putting faith and love into action and he wasn't afraid to speak out where he saw injustice. John was a supporter of the abolition of slave trade. Are we speaking out today when we hear about modern-day slavery?

John's most memorable command is as relevant for us today as when he lived:

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 the core message of this Messy Church session are the words that John, aged 87, whispered to his closest friends as he was dying, 'The best of all is, God is with us.'

How does this session help people grow in Christ?

As Christians, we can learn how to follow Christ better through the example of other Christians, including those who lived many years ago. The spoken words and life of John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, can help the congregation (of any denomination) develop an understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ.

Theme: John Wesley's key message 'best of all is, God is with us' is one we can, not only know ourselves, but also share with others as we do 'all the good we can' in our daily lives.

Bible verse: 1 John 4:19: 'We love because he [God] first loved us.' John Wesley said that this is 'the sum of the whole gospel'.

Activities

1. Family introduction

It is suggested that this is done as a starter activity to introduce people to the session

Ask people to get into groups with specific numbers of adults and children e.g. three adults and four children. Do this a few times, varying the number of adults and children. Finally finish with two adults and ten children.

Explain that our session today is all about John Wesley, who was one of ten children. What would it be like to have nine brothers and sisters/children? (John's mother had 19 births but nine children died.)

John Wesley was born in 1703, in Epworth, Lincolnshire. He is the founder of the Methodist Church and we are going find out today how his story can helps us be a follower of Jesus.

2. Solve the mystery

Give out the questionnaire to families. The answers will be found at each activity table and used at the celebration at the end of the session.

3. Strangely warmed

You will need: mouldable candle wax which moulds with the heat of your hand and candle wicks (see Baker Ross kits).

Mould your candle into the shape of a heart and fix the wick in it. As you feel the warm wax in your hand, consider the question below.

(Young children could do this exercise with playdough.)

Talking point: On Wednesday 24 May 1738, John attended a small Christian meeting in London (Aldersgate). He said, 'I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ...'

When do you feel a warm glowing feeling inside? Does it help you to feel closer to God?

4. Finding the way

(Activity from David Gregory (ed.), *Messy Church Does Science* (BRF, 2017), p. 241.)

You will need: two bar magnets; a plastic bowl; a paper clip; wire cutters; scissors; a foil container from a night light; a small coloured triangular-shaped piece of paper; a compass; water.

Take a bowl and fill it half full with water. Straighten the paper clip and cut it so that it is just longer than the small night light foil tray. Hold the paper clip out between your thumb and first finger. Now take one of the magnets and run the North Pole along the length of the paper clip. Repeat 10-20 times to magnetise the paper clip.

Cut two small slits on opposite sides of the foil tray and secure the paper clip across it. Now float this in the water and spin it around. What direction does it point in when it comes to rest? Compare this to north on your compass. If they agree, attach the triangle pointing north. If not, try magnetising the paper clip again.

Talking point: When John Wesley was alive, he didn't have a satnav. He may have used a compass. It is estimated that John travelled 250,000 miles on horseback!

John followed Jesus' example throughout his life.

How are you following Jesus? How have you not been following Jesus? What would Jesus want you to be like at school, home, at work?

5. Travelling by horse

You will need: template of horse; two pegs for each horse; card; felt-pens; google eyes; wool; a hole-punch; glue and glue-dots.

Use the template to cut out a cardboard body for your horse. Colour both sides of the body. Punch a hole in the rear of the horse and thread some pieces of wool through to form a tail. Tie a piece of wool around the top of the tail to hold it in place. Stick on the eyes and some more wool to make a mane. Colour the pegs and peg on the body.

Talking point: John rode all over Britain on his horse, telling people that God loved them. He helped them become followers of Jesus. As he rode his horse, John used to read his Bible. Can you imagine doing that? Where do you read your Bible?

6. Join my club

You will need: a flip-chart or graffiti board; felt-pens; the description below.

At Oxford University, John and his brother, Charles, formed the Holy Club. They had rules or 'methods' to help them follow Jesus. These included studying the Bible, praying together, visiting people in prison and collecting money for the poor. John's friends became known as the 'Methodists' because of their 'methods'.

We have Messy Church instead of a Holy Club. What rules could we have that will help us to follow Jesus? Write your ideas on the board.

Talking point: John developed some good habits to help him follow Jesus: getting up early, reading the Bible, praying, walking to stay healthy, writing a diary. Do you have good habits that help you follow Jesus? Can you think of some more?

7. 'All the good' fridge magnet

You will need: Template of John's words; felt-pens; sequins; laminates & laminator; magnetic strip.

Colour in and decorate your template. Laminate and stick a magnetic strip on the back.

Talking point: What good things do you do? What else could you do? Put this on your fridge to remind you each day.

8. World Biscuits

You will need: Round biscuits; blue icing; green icing or green sprinkles.

Decorate the biscuits to look like the world

Talking point: John was a priest (Church Minister). He said "I look upon the whole world as my parish". What do you think he meant by that? At first he preached in Church but then he preached on the streets as he wanted to tell people who didn't go to Church about Jesus.

(A parish is the area around a church and the people that live there).

9. Messy Wesley

You will need: a tray; very wet sand; laminated paper with the words 'God is with us' on it.

Put the laminate in the bottom of the tray and cover with wet sand.

John Wesley wasn't afraid to speak out when he saw bad things happening. He saw people being sold as slaves and said this was wrong. Some people didn't like this and threw things at him. It all got quite messy at times but there was one thing John remembered. Find out what it was at the bottom of this tray.

Talking point: Sometimes in life, we feel like we are in a mess. Things are just not going right for us. Remember what is written at the bottom of here on good days and on the days when you feel you are in a mess!

10. God with us prayers

This activity can be done as part of the celebration, after the story.

You will need: Heart shaped post-it notes; pens; a candle (possibly battery style) arranged on a cloth.

Talking point: John Wesley had difficult times in his life, riding by horseback through storms, people throwing things at him because they didn't like what he was saying, but he always remembered how he had 'felt his heart strangely warmed' and that 'God is with us' at all times.

Take a post-it note. Think of someone who needs to know that God is with them. Write their name on the post-it; perhaps a friend or relative, or someone you have seen in the news on TV that needs God's help. Or perhaps you want to write your own name because you want to have that feeling that God is with you. Put the post-it by the candle.

Celebration

Get the families to help tell the story, using the answers to the questionnaire and by joining in. When the storyteller says "*The best of all is,*" the congregation answer "*God is with us.*"

How many children were there in the Wesley family? 10.

John's Mother, Suzannah, was an amazing lady. As well as looking after all those children she also taught them at home. Suzannah felt that each child needed some one-to-one time with her so she made sure they each had a special day of the week for this. John always remembered his special Thursdays with his mother. Suzannah taught her children '*The best of all is; God is with us*'

Eventually John did go to school and then on to Oxford University and became an Anglican priest. At Oxford he led a club for his friends called the Holy Club.

What were some of the things that John did with his friends in the Holy Club?

Bible reading, prayer, walking to keep fit, visiting people in prison, giving money to the poor, writing diaries, meeting to discuss what had gone well and what hadn't. John asked his friends to "watch over one another in love"

What did John Wesley's friends become known as? Methodists and the Methodist Church was founded on the ideas of John Wesley. John told his friends '*The best of all is; God is with us*'

When did John say you should do good?

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.
And he said we should do this because "*The best of all is, God is with us.*"

Where did John say was his parish? The world.

What happened when John went to the small meeting in London (Aldersgate)?

He said "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation. It was an important moment in John's life when he felt God's love and forgiveness. He felt "*The best of all is, God is with us.*"

John wanted to tell everyone that God loved them and he began to preach on the streets telling people who didn't go to Church that God loved them too. He told them, "*The best of all is; God is with us.*"

John travelled by horse. ***How many miles did he travel?*** 250,000 miles.

It wasn't easy, sometimes John had to ride through snow, fog, wind and storms.

What did John do while riding his horse? Read the Bible.

Some people in the church didn't think that John should be preaching outside on the streets and some didn't like what he was saying. John wasn't afraid to speak up when he saw bad things happening. **What was happening that John said was wrong?** People being sold as slaves. Some people threw things at him or rang the church bells so that the people listening to him couldn't hear him! However, John was a follower of Jesus and he carried on telling people that God loved them and that *"The best of all is; God is with us"* and John did good things to show them.

John lived until he was 87 and in the last few days when he was very weak **what did John whisper to his friends?** *"The best of all is, God is with us."*

John taught us that God forgives us and loves us and we should do good things to share this message with others.

Prayer. Use prayer from activity 10.

Take-home idea

John Wesley told his friends to 'watch over one another in love' and encouraged them to discuss their 'successes and failures' as they learnt to follow Christ.

Perhaps you could find a time at the end of each day together as a family or as you put your child to bed, to ask the following questions.

What was the best part of today?

What was the worst part of today?

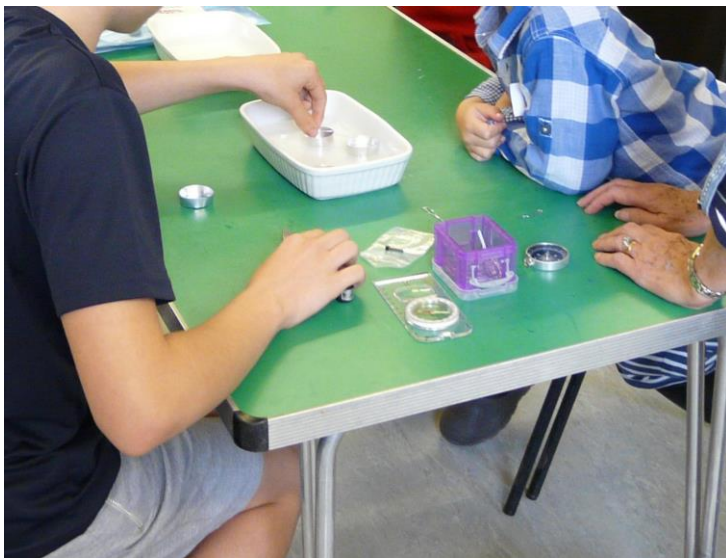
Thank God for the best part and ask him to help with the difficult things.



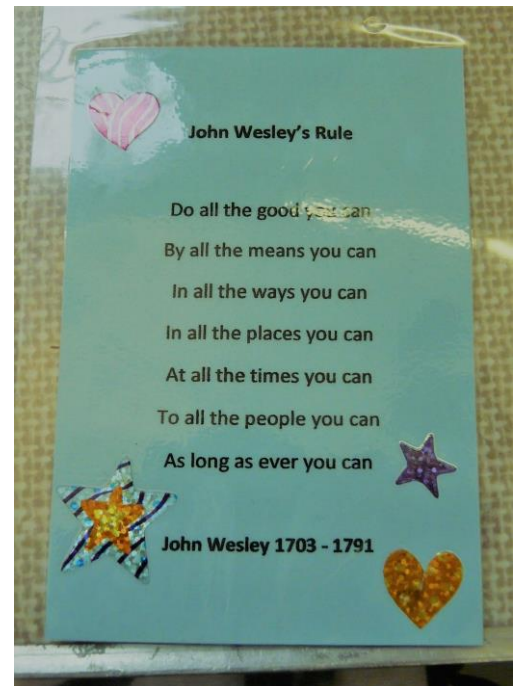
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Can you help solve the mystery? Reward for information on Mr Wesley

- 1.** How many children were there in the Wesley family?
- 2.** List some of the things that John did with his friends in the Holy Club.
- 3.** What did John's friends become known as?
- 4.** When did John say you should do good?
- 5.** Where did John say was his parish?
- 6.** What happened when John went to the small meeting in London?
- 7.** How many miles did he travel?
- 8.** What did John do while riding his horse?
- 9.** What did John say was wrong?
- 10.** What did John say was the best of all?

Wesley's Wise Words Quiz

Answers can be found at activity number in brackets. Participants can be given this clue if they are struggling. Answers are in Celebration.

1. How many children were there in the Wesley family? (1)
2. List some of the things that John did with his friends in the Holy Club? (6)
3. What did John's friends become known as? (6)
4. When did John say you should do good? (7)
5. Where did John say was his parish? (8)
6. What happened when John went to the small meeting in London (Aldersgate?) (3)
7. How many miles did he travel? (4)
8. What did John do while riding his horse? (5)
9. What did John say was wrong? (9)
10. What did John say was best of all? (9)