**All can be saved**

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| **"** | **All need to be saved.  All may be saved.  All may know themselves saved.  All may be saved to the uttermost."Traditional summary of Methodist teaching** |  |  |

Methodists have always been clear that no-one is beyond the reach of God's love. Salvation is there for everyone who turns to God, and not just for a chosen few.

***Why do we need salvation?***

As human beings we find ourselves part of an unjust, sinful and violent world, which we may feel individually helpless to change.

We may feel driven by urges such as anger, lust or greed, that we wish did not control us.

We may have personalities which are difficult to manage, for instance being prone to despair.

We may be enduring poverty and hardship.

The demands of modern life leave many of us stressed and overloaded, or isolated and feeling useless.

Loss, fear, grief or guilt may be weighing us down. We need salvation.

***What do Christians believe?***

Jesus preached the Gospel - the good news of the Kingdom of God. Through Jesus' death on the cross, and his resurrection, Christians believe that God has broken the power of all that is evil, in the world and in ourselves. If we accept forgiveness and liberation, and are willing to be open to the Holy Spirit, God can enable us to resist evil and to live life to the full.

Assurance of God's love

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| *John Wesley* |
| "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society at Aldersgate Street, where one was reading from Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans.   About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change that 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."   John Wesley |

If we have mixed feelings about faith, or are unsure whether we are feeling the right things, or unable to get away from feelings of guilt, it helps to know that we are not alone.

John Wesley wrestled with difficult feelings on his journey of faith. Although already an ordained minister in the Church of England, he did not feel he was truly loved and forgiven by God until the famous moment described in his journal for 24 May 1738. (see right)

John Wesley did not give up on his search - he actually did go and listen, even if very unwillingly. He put himself in the right place, and found that God gave him freely the sense of joy and assurance he was looking for.

Our faith rests not on our own feelings, but on the promises of a faithful God.

**Living a holy life**

The longing for holiness is not about wanting to be 'holier than thou'. It is about wanting the love of God to permeate all of our life, and for that love to be shown through our lives to other people.

God gives us the Holy Spirit, and when we respond, there is no limit to what the grace of God is able to do in a human life. John Wesley taught about 'Christian perfection.' He believed that a mature Christian can reach a state where the love of God reigns supreme in our heart. We can't be perfect in an absolute way, as God is. But we can be made perfect in love.

However we do not become holy all on our own. Methodists believe in what John Wesley called 'social holiness'. It is vital to meet and worship with other Christians in order to grow in the Christian life and to understand what is God's will for us and for our community.

The Methodist movement began in the eighteenth century when John and Charles Wesley got together with like-minded friends in Oxford to meet regularly for prayer, Bible study and Holy Communion, and to visit prisons and workhouses. It was called the Holy Club.

Holiness is not just about personal spirituality and prayer. It will also be expressed through a commitment to social justice and to enabling other people to become followers of Jesus.

# **Reading the Bible**

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| *The Bible* |
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Christians need to be familiar with the Bible and to immerse themselves in it. The books of the Old and New Testaments contain a wide variety of literature, including history, law, poetry, gospels, letters, polemic, stories and apocalyptic visions.

The texts were written and gathered together over a long period of time, and it is important to find out as much as we can about the original contexts in which texts were produced.

At the same time, Christians read the Bible as part of a faith community, and read the Bible to put ourselves into the story of God's dealings with humanity. The Bible can be puzzling but it is continually a source of inspiration and direction in our lives.

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| |  | | --- | | 'The Bible is the record of God's self revelation, supremely in Jesus Christ , and is a means through which he still reveals himself, by the Holy Spirit.'  A Catechism for the people called Methodists, | |

It is good for Christians with differing approaches to the interpretation of the Bible to engage with each other and argue through how the Bible should be applied to issues in our contemporary world.

# **The authority of the Bible**

A Methodist Conference report ' A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path' identified a wide range of views among contemporary Methodists about the Bible's authority.

**Born in song**

Methodists are well known as enthusiastic singers, in choirs and congregations. Singing is still an important means of learning about, sharing and celebrating our faith.

The newly authorised hymnbook of the Methodist Church is Singing the Faith.

The annual Methodist Conference always opens and closes with traditional hymns. Many visitors are inspired by the power of a large gathering singing unaccompanied in harmony.

John and Charles Wesley first realised the power of singing to strengthen faith when they were travelling across the Atlantic to Georgia in May 1735. There was a terrible storm at sea, but a group of German Moravian Christians inspired the brothers with their confidence in God. They preached and sang hymns together and the Wesley brothers realised their own faith was much weaker.

Three years later, back in London, both John and Charles experienced a kind of conversion in which they felt a deep assurance that they personally had received salvation .

Charles wrote in all about 6000 hymns, and many of them are still sung today, not only by Methodists, but by Christians across the world.

**A covenant with God**

'I am no longer my own but yours.   
Put me to what you will,   
rank me with whom you will;   
put me to doing,   
put me to suffering;   
let me be employed for you,   
or laid aside for you,   
exalted for you,   
or brought low for you;   
let me be full,   
let me be empty,   
let me have all things,   
let me have nothing:   
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things   
to your pleasure and disposal.   
And now, glorious and blessed God,   
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,   
you are mine and I am yours.'

Methodists hold an annual Covenant Service, at which we celebrate all that God has done for us, and affirm that we give our lives and choices to God.

Most churches hold the service in the New Year, but some hold them in September, at the beginning of the Methodist year.

The traditional Covenant prayer (shown above) makes it very clear that this affirmation is a serious one that embraces the whole of our life, in all its parts. Most people find it quite tough to say, and really mean it. But the prayer is so central to the Christian life that other Churches have also adopted it.

In our culture we tend to[**prize**](http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=1499) our ability to make decisions and choose our own path in life. It can feel very hard to give that up. But this prayer is like a love poem. It is about surrendering to God in love and joy.

**A grassroots movement**

It is a strong feature of Methodism that ordinary lay people play a major part in the running of the Church. Local lay people called 'stewards' take responsibility for the fabric of church buildings and manses and for the handling of money. They share with ordained ministers the role of setting direction for the churches in a particular area or 'circuit'.

Worship each week is not always led by an ordained minister, but often by a local preacher - a lay person who has been trained and authorized to lead worship and preach. Every ordained minister in the Methodist Church was first a local preacher.

At all levels of the Methodist Church, lay people are involved in decision making, and the vice-president of the Conference is always a lay person.

This emphasis goes back to the roots of Methodism. John Wesley was very much a folk theologian who wanted to speak 'plain truth to plain people'. He took seriously the working people of his day. He addressed his preaching to them, and drew great crowds in the street or on hillsides.

He also trusted them with responsibilities. In building the local Methodist groups or 'societies', he trained many lay people who then maintained the meetings and gave pastoral care and challenge to the members. He also trained preachers, who led worship locally, rather than travelling the country like himself.

**Small groups**

Early Methodist gatherings were called 'societies'. John Wesley encouraged different kinds of small group to develop, so that both leaders and members of the societies could receive support and challenge in their faith.

These groups, called 'classes' and 'bands' met regularly, and the idea was to be accountable to each other about how each person was living the Christian life. So people had to be very open and willing to be changed by the experience.

In the twentieth century it became less common for classes to meet in this way, but recently many Methodists have been trying to [reclaim](http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=1501) this tradition.

The supportive small group has been found to be one of the most powerful ways for people to feel that they belong and to learn and grow.

Many Methodist churches have home fellowships, Bible studies and house groups. Increasingly they are seeking in various ways to renew and expand the opportunities for Christian conversation about the things that matter.

Resurrecting the Classes is a leaflet available from the Methodist Church website. It explores the tradition of small groups in Methodist history, explains how they connect with the more recent development of cell church and gives lots of practical advice about doing small groups well.

Some churches have been re-thinking the whole way their church is structured, and have put small groups at the centre, through Cell Church. See [www.celluk.org.uk](http://www.celluk.org.uk)

**The Methodist quadrilateral**

Methodists traditionally use a fourfold approach to learn about our Christian faith and [apply](http://www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=1504) it to contemporary issues and to our Christian practice:

**Scripture**

We seek to discover the word of God through reading the Bible. There are different understandings among Methodists about the Bible's authority in our lives. We need to use resources like different Bible translations, commentaries and Bible reading notes.

**Tradition**

This is the wisdom and creativity of Christians over time and across the world. It includes inspirational material like hymns, songs, prayers, poetry, Christian art and devotional books,. There are also formally agreed teachings like the creeds, the content of the catechism, and statements and reports from the Methodist Conference.

**Reason**

We are called to love God with our minds as well as with our hearts. To the best of our ability we need to think things through in the light of reason. This means becoming aware of different points of view, and using our own critical thinking to make sense of God's world.

**Experience**

Methodism particularly stresses the importance of our own experience of God's grace working in our lives. We gain wisdom and maturity from life experience, especially when we pray and reflect about our story with other Christians.

**The Connexion**

Methodists belong to local churches or ecumenical partnerships, but also feel part of a larger connected community, the Connexion.

This sense of being connected makes a difference to how the Methodist Church as a whole is structured. At its heart is an understanding of the Christian community as the 'body of Christ '. Just as a human body contains different limbs and organs that depend on each other, so we should be close and caring enough to feel each other's pain and delight. We should put the good of the whole body before our own individual needs.

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| |  | | --- | | *'Do not allow yourself one thought of separating from your brothers and sisters, whether their opinions agree with yours or not.'* John Wesley | |

The promise of mutual support is a strength of Methodism. If you become a member of the Methodist Church, a pastoral visitor is responsible for visiting you and offering spiritual support, encouragement and challenge.

In the Methodist Church decisions are made as openly as possible, giving opportunities for all to contribute. It is important for all views to be heard and taken seriously, especially where Christians disagree.