

***Sweet Singer***  
**Study Guide**  
**S T Kimbrough, Jr.**  
**DVD #6317**

**Introduction**

Charles Wesley (1707-1788) was the son of Susanna and Samuel Wesley. Of his eighteen sisters and brothers only ten survived infancy, seven sisters and two brothers. He and his brother John were the founders of the Methodist movement within the Church of England. Charles Wesley is known as a poet and hymn writer, but few know much about the man himself as husband, father, Anglican-Methodist, and priest. This play introduces one to the person of Charles Wesley, his family, joys and sorrows, anguish and elation, struggles and victories, trials, triumphs, and poetry.

Charles married Sarah Gwynne in 1749 and they were extremely happy and well suited to one another. They had eight children, only three of whom survived infancy—Samuel, Charles, Jr., and Sarah or Sally. The play is historical fiction in that much of the text comes directly from Charles's letters, poems, and journal. The contour of the story line is fictional in that it begins at a time in 18<sup>th</sup> century England when the British fear an invasion of the French. Charles Wesley is already married and has a family. The dramatic license in the story is that Charles is away from home in the southern part of England. He surmises that if the French invade and he is taken prisoner, he may not see his children again. Hence, he is trying to write a letter to them, as though it might be his last. As he reaches a certain point in the letter, he cannot continue. He does not know what to say to his children. Then he remembers a letter his father wrote to him when he went away to school. It is an authentic letter. Charles has kept it in an old letterbox. He takes it out and reads it. This then takes him on a reminiscence through his life.

Throughout the play Charles's hymns are used as a commentary on his life and witness as a husband, father, and priest of the Church of England. The one hymn which recurs through the play, "Come, O thou Traveler unknown," was inspired by the biblical story of Jacob wrestling the angel in Genesis 32, and might be considered autobiographical of Charles's own spiritual journey to conversion and afterwards.

Each study session usually includes at least one Charles Wesley hymn text. Since only portions of the hymns are used in the scenes of the play, the full texts of the hymns are quoted in the study sessions. This provides an opportunity to explore the hymn texts in depth and in the context of Charles's own life.

**Preparation:**

1. Post the Charles Wesley Timeline (see end of study guide) at the first study session and keep it up throughout all of the sessions.
2. Post around the room the following quotations from Charles Wesley hymns.

"Thy nature and thy name is love."

"Wrestling, I will not let thee go,  
till I thy name, thy nature know."

“Thou hidden source of calm repose,  
...  
my help and refuge from my foes.”

“Come, thou long-expected Jesus,  
born to set thy people free.”

“Outcasts of men, to you I call,  
harlots and publicans and thieves.”

“Their fury shall never our steadfast shock,  
the weakest believer is built on a rock.”

“Work for the weak, and sick, and poor,  
raiment and food for them procure.”

“Lost in wonder, love, and praise.”

3. Make sure Bibles and *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989) or other standard hymnal are available.

**Study Session 1: Prologue / Act I, Scene 1: The Letter / Act I, Scene 2: Family Poets**

The Prologue includes stanzas 1 and 2 from Wesley's famous text, "Come, O thou Traveler unknown." The full text of the poem is included for further reference in the study guide.

1. Come, O thou Traveler unknown,  
whom still I hold, but cannot see!  
My company before is gone,  
and I am left alone with thee;  
with thee all night I mean to stay  
and wrestle till the break of day.
2. I need not tell thee who I am,  
my misery and sin declare;  
thyself hast called me by my name,  
look on thy hands and read it there.  
But who, I ask thee, who art thou?  
Tell me thy name, and tell me now.
3. In vain thou strugglest to get free,  
I never will unloose my hold;  
art thou the man that died for me?  
The secret of thy love unfold;  
wrestling, I will not let thee go  
till I thy name, thy nature know.
4. Wilt thou not yet to me reveal  
thy new, unutterable name?  
Tell me, I still beseech thee, tell,  
to know it now resolved I am;  
wrestling, I will not let thee go,  
till I thy name, thy nature know.
5. 'Tis all in vain to hold thy tongue  
or touch the hollow of my thigh;  
though every sinew be unstrung,  
out of my arms thou shalt not fly;  
wrestling I will not let thee go  
till I thy name, thy nature know.
6. What though my shrinking flesh complain  
and murmur to contend so long?  
I rise superior to my pain:  
when I am weak then I am strong,  
and when my all of strength shall fail  
I shall with the God-man prevail.
7. My strength is gone, my nature dies,  
I sink beneath thy weighty hand,  
faint to revive, and fall to rise;  
I fall, and yet by faith I stand;  
I stand and will not let thee go  
till I thy name, thy nature know.

8. Yield to me now—for I am weak  
but confident in self-despair!  
Speak to my heart, in blessing speak,  
be conquered by my instant prayer:  
speak, or thou never hence shalt move,  
and tell me if thy name is Love.
9. 'Tis Love! 'tis Love! thou diedst for me,  
I hear thy whisper in my heart.  
The morning breaks, the shadows flee,  
pure Universal Love thou art:  
to me, to all thy mercies move—  
thy nature, and thy name is Love.
10. My prayer hath power with God; the grace  
unspeakable I now receive;  
through faith I see thee face to face,  
I see thee face to face, and live!  
In vain I have not wept and strove—  
thy nature, and thy name is Love.
11. I know thee, Savior, who thou art,  
Jesus, the feeble sinner's friend;  
nor wilt thou with the night depart,  
but stay and love me to the end:  
thy mercies never shall remove,  
thy nature, and thy name is Love.
12. The Sun of Righteousness on me  
hath risen with healing in his wings:  
withered my nature's strength; from thee  
my soul its life and succor brings;  
my help is all laid up above;  
thy nature, and thy name is Love.
13. Contented now upon my thigh  
I halt, till life's short journey end;  
all helplessness, all weakness I  
on thee alone for strength depend;  
nor have I power from thee to move:  
thy nature, and thy name is Love.
14. Lame as I am, I take the prey,  
hell, earth, and sin with ease overcome;  
I leap for joy, pursue my way,  
and as a bounding hart fly home,  
through all eternity to prove  
thy nature, and thy name is Love.

With these lines Charles Wesley has related the heart of his own spiritual autobiography. He sees the struggles of his own life mirrored in Jacob's wrestling with the angel (Genesis 32). Wesley's life struggle was *to know* the Unknown Traveler.

The first two stanzas serve as a Prologue to *Sweet Singer*, as they express Charles's deep desire to experience personally the revelation of the divine self. It is as though, just as Jacob

wrestles the angel, Charles can sense (“hold”) but cannot see God. Yet, he knows that he does not need to reveal his own identity to God, for God knows who he is.

Charles’s struggle is an identity crisis: Who is God and who am I? If I want divine vitality in my life, how can I receive it? In the Bible story, Jacob must first be asked who he is before he can receive the blessing. Wesley says, however,

I need not tell thee who I am,  
my misery or sin declare;  
thyself hast called me by my name;  
look on thy hands, and read it there.

In stanza 2, he inquires “Who, I ask thee, who art thou?” and he relates God’s Incarnation in Christ to Wesley’s own name, which he suggests can be read in the nail-scarred hands of Jesus. God knows the generations of humankind by the name “sinner” and that name is written in the pierced hands of Jesus upon the cross. God knows who we are.

Charles knows that the struggle in which he is involved requires endurance and perseverance.

Wrestling, I will not let thee go,  
till I thy name, thy nature know.

It is easy to give up in the midst of the struggle to know God. When we despair, lack confidence, and doubt, we must hold fast to the Unknown Traveler whom we cannot see, namely, God. We must “wrestle till the break of day,” which is a lifelong struggle. This was Israel’s experience. It is ours also. If we endure and do not let go, we will emerge from the struggle knowing that God’s name and nature are one and the same: Love.

## **The Wesley Family**

In *Act I, Scene 1, “The Letter,”* and *Act I, Scene 2, “Family Poets,”* we are introduced to Charles and part of his family. Charles was the youngest son of the Wesley family. His mother, Susanna, gave birth to nineteen children of whom seven girls and three boys survived. The surviving children born to Samuel (1662-1735) and Susanna Annesley Wesley (1670-1742) are as follows:

Samuel (1691-1739)  
Emilia (1691-1770)  
Susanna (1695-1764)  
Mary (1696-1764)  
Mehetabel (1697-1751)  
Anne (1702 - ? )  
John (1703-1791)  
Martha (1707?-1791)  
Charles (1707-1788)  
Keziah (1710-1741)

Charles and his wife Sarah Gwynne had eight children only three of whom survived the first year of infancy: Charles (1757-1834), Sarah (1760-1828), Samuel (1766-1837). Father

Samuel was a priest of the Church of England and assigned to the Epworth Rectory in Lincolnshire, where Charles Wesley was born. He was a well-educated classical scholar and taught some of his children Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. John and Charles developed excellence in these languages and sister Mehetabel is reported to have been able to read the Greek New Testament when she was just eight years old. Mother Susanna was the primary educator, however, of her ten surviving children.

It is most interesting how many poets there were in the family. Father Samuel published books of hymns and poems. One of his hymns is found in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), "Behold the Savior of mankind" (Hymn #293). This hymn is believed to have survived the fire that destroyed the Epworth Rectory on February 9, 1709, which the Wesley family also miraculously survived.

1. Behold the Savior of mankind  
nailed to the shameful tree;  
how vast the love that him inclined  
to bleed and die for thee!
2. Hark how he groans! while nature shakes,  
and earth's strong pillars bend!  
The temple's veil in sunder breaks,  
the solid marbles rend.
3. 'Tis done! the precious ransom's paid!  
"Receive my soul!" he cries;  
see where he bows his sacred head!  
He bows his head and dies!
4. But soon he'll break death's envious chain  
and in full glory shine.  
O Lamb of God, was ever pain,  
was ever love like thine?

Charles's eldest brother Samuel was also an Anglican priest and poet. After Samuel left Westminster School and became headmaster of Tiverton School, Charles would often to go visit him and read and copy his poetry. In the Georgia section of Charles's Journal (1736) he quotes the line, "Death hath quicker wings than love," from a poem, "Epigram from the Greek," by his brother Samuel.

Sister Mehetabel or Hetty, as she was called, also possessed superb poetical talent. A number of her poems were published in the *Gentlemen's Magazine* of that time. Here is part of a one of her poems that describes the plight of the Wesley sisters and women in general in 18<sup>th</sup> century England:

Fortune has fixed thee in a place  
Debarred of wisdom, wit and grace.  
High births and virtue equally they scorn,  
As asses dull, on dunghills born;  
Impervious as the stones, their heads are found;  
Their rage and hatred steadfast as the ground.  
With these unpolished wights thy youthful days  
Glide slow and dull, and nature's lamp decays.

At the end of Scene 1 there are two stanzas (1 and 4 below) of a longer poem that begins, “Thou hidden source of calm repose” (UMH #153).

1. Thou hidden source of calm repose,  
    thou all sufficient love divine,  
my help and refuge from my foes,  
    secure I am if thou art mine;  
and lo! from sin and grief and shame  
I hide me, Jesus, in thy name.
2. Thy mighty name salvation is,  
    and keeps my happy soul above;  
comfort it brings, and power and peace,  
    and joy and everlasting love;  
to me with thy dear name are given  
pardon and holiness and heaven.
3. Jesus, my all in all thou art,  
    my rest in toil, my ease in pain,  
the med'cine of my broken heart,  
    in war my peace, in loss my gain,  
my smile beneath the tyrant's frown,  
in shame my glory and my crown,
4. In want my plentiful supply,  
    in weakness my almighty power,  
in bonds my perfect liberty,  
    my light in Satan's darkest hour,  
in grief my joy unspeakable,  
my life in death, my heaven in hell.

The opening lines remind one of Charles's struggle to know the unknown Traveler. He says that God is the “hidden source of calm repose.”

### **Family relationships**

In Scenes 1 and 2 we encounter some members of Charles's family. One senses his perception of his father as strict and stern, and mother Susanna as an effective teacher of the children. Susanna also expected her children to be well disciplined. For example, when they were small, they never received anything for which they cried. Charles acknowledges that after he went away to school and later to the university it was probably his mother's prayers that awakened him out of a lethargy that prevented him from benefiting fully from his studies.

One senses also something of the lifelong dynamics of the relationship of Charles and John. The latter exercised a strong, big-brother influence on the former, yet Charles demonstrated that he had a mind of his own. Charles says in a letter to John that he is confident God will establish what he has begun in him through John's means. Hence, there is a spiritual bond, which binds the brothers beyond a mere brotherly affection.

## **Holy Club at Oxford**

One also encounters here a recollection of the beginnings of the Holy Club at Oxford University, when Charles and John were students there. It is not necessary to speculate on the chronology of who started the small group of students who met early in the morning for prayer, meditation, Bible study, attended the weekly sacrament of Holy Communion and often went out to the prisons to offer spiritual and physical food to the prisoners. The reality is that both brothers, Charles and John, committed themselves to a routine or method of study and spiritual discipline for the each day.

### **Questions for discussion:**

1. What do you think Charles means by the lines—  
“thyself hast called me by my name, / look on thy hands and read it there”?
2. It is averred that, though Charles and John Wesley had many differences, love never diminished between them. How is this possible? How can you differ with members of your own family on major or minor issues and prevent love from diminishing between you?
3. How is it possible for a mother to say of her children who might commit their lives to mission service, as did Susanna: “I would rejoice, if I had twenty sons who were all so employed, though I should never see them more”?
4. Does Charles have a “progressive” view of the role of women in the 18<sup>th</sup> century?  
What do you make of Mehetabel’s indictment of the oppression of women at that time?

### **Activity for Session 1:**

Have everyone read Genesis 32:24-32. Post the first eight stanzas of “Come, O thou Traveler unknown” on separate sheets around the room. Divide the participants so that at least one person is standing before each of the eight stanzas. After reading and absorbing the stanza each is facing, ask everyone to ponder and discuss in small groups (depending on the number of participants) or all together the following questions:

1. What does the stanza say about one’s quest to follow Christ?
2. What does the stanza say about one’s self-image?
3. How do the stanzas relate to Genesis 32?

### **Activity for Session 1:**

Form two groups to discuss: (a) the poem by Hetty Wesley, and (b) Wesley’s hymn “Thou hidden Source of calm repose.” Address the following questions and report back to the whole group:

Group A: How does Hetty’s view of women in the 18<sup>th</sup> century fit into the Wesleys’ view of women and their role(s) in the Methodist movement and mission?

Group B: What does Charles Wesley mean by speaking of God as a “hidden source of calm repose”?

**Study Session 2: Act I, Scene 3, “Reluctant Ordination” / Act I, Scene 4, “On Board the Ship *Simmonds*”**

While Charles Wesley had all of the appropriate education and training to be ordained in the Church of England, he had not pursued ordination. By 1735, when John made the decision to accompany Colonel James Oglethorpe to Georgia as a missionary, he was already an Anglican priest. Charles was extremely reticent about entering Holy Orders, but John insisted that he be ordained and accompany him as a missionary to the New World. This is the reason why Charles obtained both orders, deacon and priest, within a week. He was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Oxford and the very next Sunday priest by the Bishop of London.

Charles was by no means confident about his role as a missionary. Hence, he wrote in a letter of his despair. “In vain have I fled from myself to America. I still groan under the intolerable weight of inherent misery. If I have not repented of my undertaking, it is because I could have hoped for nothing better in England or paradise. Go where I will, I carry my own hell about me.” Wesley’s search is our search. It is the faith experience that goes back for centuries: we struggle to know the name and nature of God. We grasp for the Unknown, and we hold fast to that which we cannot see.

One of the things that aided Charles in this quest was his encounter with the Moravian passengers on Board the *Simmonds* on the voyage to America during a storm, when all could have been lost, the ship and their lives. Hearing them sing and pray confidently in the hold of the ship during this violent storm, launched him on a lifelong journey to explore the expression of faith and multiple dimensions of spirituality through sacred poetry and hymns.

His brother John was equally passionate about this mode of expression. Even before Charles broke on the scene as a sacred poet in 1738, John had begun translating many of the German hymns into English, while in the colony of Georgia. In the following text (stanzas 1 and 4 are used in *Sweet Singer*) he eloquently expressed the search for the unseen, “hidden” God in the translation of a German hymn by Gerhard Tersteegen (see UMH #414):

1. Thou hidden love of God, whose height,  
    whose depth unfathomed no one knows,  
I see from far thy beauteous light,  
    and inly sigh for thy repose;  
my heart is pained, nor can it be  
at rest, till it find rest in thee.
2. Thy secret voice invites me still  
    the sweetness of thy yoke to prove  
and fain I would, but though my will  
    be fixed, yet wide my passions rove.  
Yet hindrances strew all the way;  
I aim at thee, yet from thee stray.
3. 'Tis mercy all that thou hast brought  
    my mind to seek its peace in thee;  
yet while I seek, but find thee not,  
    no peace my wandering soul shall see.  
O when shall all my wanderings end,  
and all my steps to thee-ward tend?

4. Is there a thing beneath the sun  
that strives with thee my heart to share?  
Ah, tear it thence and reign alone,  
the Lord of every motion there;  
then shall my heart from earth be free,  
when it hath found repose in thee.
5. O, hide thyself from me, that I  
no more, but Christ in me may live!  
My vile affections crucify,  
Nor let one darling lust survive.  
In all things nothing may I see,  
Nothing desire or see but thee!
6. O Love, thy sovereign aid impart  
to save me from low-thoughted care;  
chase this self-will from all my heart,  
through all its hidden mazes there;  
make me thy duteous child, that I  
ceaseless may, "Abba, Father," cry.
7. Ah no! ne'er will I backward turn:  
thine wholly, thine alone I am!  
Thrice happy he who views with scorn  
earth's toys, for thee his constant flame.  
O, help, that I may never move  
from the blest footsteps of thy love!
8. Each moment draw from earth away  
my heart that lowly waits thy call;  
speak to my inmost soul and say,  
"I am thy love, thy God, thy all!"  
To feel thy power, to hear thy voice,  
to taste thy love, be all my choice.

**Questions for discussion:**

1. How is it possible that someone can enter the ordained ministry when they are not 100% certain of God's call?
2. Is it appropriate to express one's doubts about faith and God as does Charles?
3. What does John Wesley mean in these lines he translated from Tersteegen?  
"Thou hidden love of God, / whose depth unfathomed *no one knows*"? Does he really mean that God's love is so hidden that no one can really know its depth?

**Activity for Session 2:**

Divide the participants into small groups and have them (1) list all of the hindrances to a relationship with God addressed in the hymn, "Thou hidden love of God," and (2) describe the role of love in overcoming the hindrances listed. Both groups are to report back to the whole group with their findings.

**Study Session 3: Act I, Scene 5: “The Colony of Georgia” / Act I, Scene 6: “Slavery, Charles-town”**

We turn once again for a commentary on Charles’s restlessness as he enters his ministry and responsibilities in Georgia to the autobiographical hymn of his spiritual journey, “Come, O thou Traveler unknown.” His query of God in stanza 4 is most appropriate for this time in his life.

Wilt thou not yet to me reveal  
thy new, unutterable name?  
Tell me, I still beseech thee, tell,  
to know it now resolved I am;  
wrestling, I will not let thee go,  
till I thy name, thy nature know.

Even though he entered upon his responsibilities in Georgia with eagerness and a new perspective, it was long before he was despairing of his endless letter writing responsibilities for James Oglethorpe, the governor of Georgia, and the unhappy occurrence of being falsely accused by two women of having sexual relations with them. Charles was in despair and acknowledged that he had gone to America to save the Indians and felt lost himself.

Nevertheless this despair was nothing compared to that he experienced after arriving in Charles-town [later Charleston, SC], where he would set sail for home. There he encountered slavery for the first time, for it had not existed in Georgia at that time. Here is an entry from his Journal regarding the horrors of slavery.

**August 1736**

**Monday, August 2.** I had observed much, and heard more, of the cruelty of masters towards their negroes. But now I received an authentic account of some horrid instances thereof. The giving a child a slave of its own age to tyrannize over, to beat and abuse out of sport, was, I myself saw, a common practice. Nor is it strange that being thus trained up in cruelty, they should afterwards arrive at so great perfection in it; that Mr Star, a gentleman I often met at Mr Laserre’s, should, as he himself informed Laserre, first nail up a negro by the ears, then order him to be whipped in the severest manner, and then to have scalding water thrown all over him, so that the poor creature could not stir for four months after. Another much applauded punishment is drawing their slaves’ teeth. One Colonel Lynch is universally known to have cut off a poor negro’s legs, and to kill several of them every year by his barbarities.

It were endless to recount all the shocking instances of diabolical cruelty which these men (as they call themselves) daily practice upon their fellow-creatures, and that on the most trivial occasions. I shall only mention one more, related to me by a Swiss gentleman, Mr [Sebastian] Zouberbuhler, an eyewitness of Mr Hill, a dancing-master in Charles-town. He whipped a she-slave so long, that she fell down at his feet for dead. When by the help of a physician she was so far recovered as to show signs of life, he repeated the whipping with equal rigour, and concluded with dropping hot sealing wax upon her flesh. Her crime was overfilling a tea-cup.

These horrid cruelties are the less to be wondered at, because the government itself in effect countenances and allows them to kill their slaves by the ridiculous penalty appointed for it, of about 7 pounds sterling (half of which is usually saved by the criminal’s informing against himself). This I can look upon as no other than a public act to indemnify murder.

Against this background read Wesley's hymn, "Come, thou long-expected Jesus" (UMH #196).

1. Come, thou long-expected Jesus,  
born to set thy people free;  
from our fears and sins release us,  
let us find our rest in thee.  
Israel's strength and consolation,  
hope of all the earth thou art;  
dear desire of every nation,  
joy of every longing heart.
2. Born thy people to deliver,  
born a child and yet a King,  
born to reign in us forever,  
now thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By thine own eternal spirit  
rule in all our hearts alone;  
by thine all sufficient merit,  
raise us to thy glorious throne.

This powerful hymn of freedom and deliverance takes on added dimensions of meaning when we consider Charles's encounter with slavery, of which he became a lifelong opponent. As this hymn declares, he knew that Jesus was born to set all people free; yes, the slaves too! Mortified by the terror of slavery, he could only hope that slaves, their masters, and all touched by this savage villainy could be set free from fears and sins and find their peace in Jesus. This is the only "hope of all the earth," Wesley cried out.

Charles wrote this hymn after his return to England and his life-changing conversion on May 21 (Pentecost Day), 1738. He understood and had experienced that Jesus was truly born to deliver people from bondage, and that when he ruled their hearts, they could no longer subject others to the tyranny of servitude. In a world teeming with injustice one needs to sing this hymn with great expectancy and live its message until all those who are enslaved to sin and human bondage are set free!

### **Questions for discussion:**

1. What does it mean to be released from "fears and sins"?
2. How does one interpret Christ as "hope of all the earth"?
3. What is the meaning of the message that Christ was born "to deliver" people from the bondage of sin and oppression and to replace earthly rulers with the reign of love in human hearts?  
How can this be accomplished?

### **Activity for Session 3:**

Provide paper, pencils, crayons, charcoal, newsprint, construction paper, etc. and ask the participants to depict Charles's description of slavery in the August 2 1736 entry of his Journal. Post the artistic depictions, drawings, colorings, etc. and then have the group sing "Come, O thou Traveler unknown." You may wish to alternate singing a stanza and reading a stanza. Afterward discuss the relation of Charles Wesley's words and the drawings / depictions made by the group.

#### Study Session 4: Act I, Scene 7, England / Act II, Scene 1, England

Charles's return to England begins a new chapter in his life, one that leads to lifelong transformation. How was he to overcome the despair that had accompanied his departure from the American colonies. He felt that he had been a failure in proclaiming the gospel to the Native Americans. His experience of the false accusations of Mrs. Hawkins and Mrs. Welch was emotionally draining. The encounter with slavery was horrifying. Being a passenger on a ship at sea with a drunken captain was frightening. In addition, Charles began the return voyage very ill. Still a sign of hope was the memory of the inspiring encounter with the Moravians on board the ship *Simmonds* in the midst of a storm and in the colony at their gatherings when they sang and prayed in worship.

Once back in England Charles sought out a group of Moravians in London and had a number of encounters with their leader, Count Zinzendorf. Peter Böhler, a Moravian in England at the time, asked Charles to teach him English. Böhler seems to have had a powerful influence upon Charles. One of the things he is reported to have said to Charles, though whether he said it in English or German, is indeed a question, is: "If I had a thousand tongues, I would use them all to praise God." Whether these are Böhler's exact words is not the issue. The reality is that from Moravians like Böhler, Charles experienced the importance of raising the corporate voices of God's people in praise of the Almighty. For him this becomes a lifelong vocation and he believes that doxology is an integral part of every Christian's daily life. Thus, in 1739, a year after his conversion (May 21, 1738), Charles wrote a hymn of 18 stanzas celebrating his transformation in Christ. We know stanzas 7 through 12 (see below) as the familiar hymn "O for a thousand tongues to sing" (UMH #57/58).

1. Glory to God, and praise and love  
be ever, ever given,  
by saints below and saints above,  
the church in earth and heaven.
2. On this glad day the glorious Sun  
of Righteousness arose;  
on my benighted soul he shone  
and filled it with repose.
3. Sudden expired the legal strife,  
'twas then I ceased to grieve;  
my second, real, living life  
I then began to live.
4. Then with my heart I first believed,  
believed with faith divine,  
power with the Holy Ghost received  
yo call the Savior mine.
5. I felt my Lord's anointing blood  
close to my soul applied;  
me, me he loved, the Son of God,  
for me, for me he died!

6. I found and owned his promise true,  
ascertained of my part,  
my pardon passed in heaven I knew  
when written on my heart.
7. O for a thousand tongues to sing  
my dear Redeemer's praise!  
The glories of my God and King,  
the triumphs of his grace.
8. My gracious Master and my God,  
assist me to proclaim,  
to spread through all the earth abroad  
the honors of thy name.
9. Jesus! the name that charms our fears,  
that bids our sorrows cease;  
'tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'tis life, and health, and peace.
10. He breaks the power of canceled sin,  
he sets the prisoner free;  
his blood can make the foulest clean;  
his blood availed for me.
11. He speaks, and listening to his voice  
new life the dead receive;  
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice,  
the humble poor believe.
12. Hear him, ye deaf, his praise, ye dumb,  
your loosened tongues employ;  
ye blind, behold your Savior come,  
and leap, ye lame, for joy.
13. Look unto him, ye nations, own  
your God, ye fallen race!  
Look, and be saved through faith alone,  
be justified by grace!
14. See all your sins on Jesus laid;  
the Lamb of God was slain,  
his soul was once an offering made  
for every soul of man.
15. Harlots and publicans and thieves,  
in holy triumph join!  
Saved is the sinner that believes  
from crimes as great as mine.
16. Murderers and all ye hellish crew,  
ye sons of lust and pride,  
believe the Savior died for you;  
for me the Savior died.

17. Awake from guilty nature's sleep,  
and Christ will give you light,  
call all your sins into the deep,  
and wash the Ethiop white.
18. With me, your chief, you then shall know,  
shall feel your sins forgiven;  
anticipate your heaven below  
and own that love is heaven.

Congregations usually do not sing stanzas 15 to 18. Stanzas 15 and 16, however, clearly unite praise and mission and remind us of the inclusiveness of the gospel.

15. Harlots and publicans and thieves,  
in holy triumph join!  
Saved is the sinner that believes  
from crimes as great as mine.
16. Murderers and all ye hellish crew,  
ye sons of lust and pride,  
believe the Savior died for you;  
for me the Savior died.

“O for a thousand tongues to sing” stresses not only the need for a global outcry of praise to God for redemption but calls the church and individual Christians to fulfill their mission: praise *and* reach out to *all!*

**Questions for discussion:**

1. How many churches consciously seek out prostitutes, thieves, criminals of all sorts, murderers, and hell raisers?
2. How many churches seek to make the following affirmation a reality?

Hear him ye deaf, his praise, ye dumb,  
your loosened tongues employ;  
ye blind, behold your Savior come,  
and leap, ye lame, for joy.

3. To what extent should churches make their worship experiences accessible to the deaf, blind, and lame? Are sign language, hearing aids, Braille, ramps, lifts, wheelchairs, and vehicles with hydraulic lifts available to those in need? What about classes for persons with learning disabilities?

*Act II, Scene 1, England*

In this scene we learn briefly some of the story of Charles Wesley’s conversion of May 21, 1738. During the previous month (on April 25) Charles and John had a rather heated argument about instantaneous conversion. Charles “insisted a man need not know when first he had faith.” Here is the account.

**Tuesday, April 25.** Soon after five, as we were met in the little chapel, Mrs Delamotte came to us. Sang, fell into a dispute whether conversion was gradual or instantaneous. My brother was very positive for the latter, and very shocking—mentioned some later instances of gross sinners believing in a moment. I was much offended at

his worse than unedifying discourse. Mrs Delamotte left us abruptly. I stayed, and insisted a man need not know when first he had faith. His obstinacy in favouring the contrary drove me at last out of the room. Mr Broughton was only not so much scandalized as myself. After dinner, he and my brother returned to town. I stayed behind, and read them the *Life of Mr Halyburton*—one instance, but only one, of instantaneous conversion.

The irony of Charles's reaction is that almost a month later on May 21 (Pentecost Day) he experienced in the quiet of his sick room at Mr. Bray's house the power of salvation for the first time. The last words of his Journal entry for May 21 are these:

I now found myself at peace with God and rejoiced in the hope of loving Christ. My temper for the rest of the day was mistrust of my own great, but before unknown, weakness. I saw that by faith I stood; by the continual support of faith, which kept me from falling, though of myself I am ever sinking into sin. I went to bed still sensible of my own weakness (I humbly hope to be more and more so), yet confident of Christ's protection.

In the hymn, "Come, O thou Traveler unknown," the transitional stanza is number 9. The last line of stanza 8 says: "and tell me if thy name is love." Stanza 9 begins with his own confession of faith in Christ: "'Tis love, 'tis love, thou diedst for me."

'Tis Love! 'tis Love! thou diedst for me,  
I hear thy whisper in my heart.  
The morning breaks, the shadows flee,  
pure Universal Love thou art:  
to me, to all thy mercies move--  
thy nature, and thy name is Love.

From this point onward to the end of the poem the last line of every stanza (stanzas 9 to 14) declares: "thy nature, and thy name is love!"

Reread the entire poem, "Come, O thou traveler unknown" found in session 1 of this study. Notice that stanzas 1 through 8 tell of the agony of the struggle, the mental and physical pain, and the soul-searching questions that often drive some people away from God. Stanzas 9 through 14, however, describe the discovery of faith that resounds in the refrain: "Thy nature and thy name is Love." Love with a capital "L" is who God is, what God is like, and the way in which God's self-disclosure is revealed to us. It is God's love made known in Jesus that makes the shadows of doubt flee as dawn breaks and we confess with Wesley: "Pure, universal Love thou art!"

Even after the revelation of May 21, 1738, when Charles grasped the reality of God's love for him in Jesus Christ, the struggle to know the heights and depths of such love and the God who gave and gives of self in that love continued until his death at age eighty-one. This poem is not only his spiritual autobiography; it is ours as well.

It is interesting that African Americans in their own struggle appropriated the theme which Wesley so eloquently expressed in this hymn in a slave song entitled "Wrestlin' Jacob."

O wrestlin' Jacob, Jacob, day's a-breakin';  
I will not let thee go!  
O wrestlin' Jacob, Jacob, day's a-breakin';  
He will not let me go!  
O, I hold my brudder wid a tremblin' hand;  
I would not let him go!  
I hold my sister wid a tremblin' hand;  
I would not let her go!

O, Jacob do hand from a tremblin' limb,  
He would not let him go!  
O, Jacob do hang from a tremblin' limb,  
De Lord will bless my soul.<sup>1</sup>

**Questions for discussion:**

How do we address the questions Charles Wesley is asking?

Who is God?

Who, I ask thee, who art thou? (stanza 2)

Who is Jesus?

Art thou the Man that died for me? (stanza 3)

Can I know God?

Wilt thou not yet to me reveal thy new, unutterable name? (stanza 4)

**Activity for Session 4:**

Have everyone read the first six stanzas of “Glory to God, and Praise and Love.” (Stanzas 7-12 of the same hymn or poem are the familiar stanzas of the hymn known as “O for a thousand tongues to sing.”) They are as follows:

1. Glory to God, and praise and love  
be ever, ever given,  
by saints below and saints above,  
the church in earth and heaven.
2. On this glad the glorious Sun  
of Righteousness arose;  
on my benighted soul he shone  
and filled it with repose.
3. Sudden expired the legal strife,  
'twas then I ceased to grieve;  
my second, real, living life  
I then began to live.
4. Then with my heart I first believed,  
believed with faith divine,  
power with the Holy Ghost received  
to call the Savior mine.
5. I felt my Lord's anointing blood  
close to my soul applied;  
me, me he loved, the Son of God,  
for me, for me he died!
6. I found and owned his promise true,  
ascertained of my part,  
my pardon passed in heaven I knew  
when written on my heart.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Story of the Jubilee Singers including their songs*, by J. B. T. Marsh (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897), No. 62.

Have everyone make their own notes on the following items:

1. the main theme of these stanzas;
2. the key words used and their meaning;
3. biblical references that could be cited in relationship to the lines of the hymn;
4. the basic theology of these stanzas;
5. problems or concerns that the hymn raises for members of the group.

**Activity for Session 4:**

Read stanzas 9 - 14 of "Come, O thou Traveler unknown." Discuss these stanzas as describing Charles Wesley's life after conversion on May 21, 1738.

## Study Session 5: Act II, Scene 2: Mr. Bray's house

In this scene we learn of the hymn which Charles probably wrote on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, just two days after his conversion experience, and in his Journal is found the only record (aside from John's brief description) of his brother John's life-transforming experience at the Aldersgate Street Society meeting on May 24<sup>th</sup>.

Charles has been ill and is staying in the home of Mr. Bray and is attempting to write a hymn on his conversion, which he eventually completes. It is generally believed that the hymn was "Where shall my wondering soul begin." In his Journal Charles records, "At nine [on May 23] I began an hymn upon my conversion, but was persuaded to break off, for fear of pride. Mr. Bray coming, encouraged me to proceed in spite of Satan. I prayed Christ to stand by me and finished the hymn" (see UMH #342). Stanzas 1, 3, and 7 are used in *Sweet Singer*.

1. 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?
2. O how shall I the goodness tell,  
Father, which thou to me hast showed?  
That I, a child of wrath and hell,  
I should be called a child of God!  
Should know, should feel my sins forgiven,  
blest with this antepast of heaven!
3. And shall I slight my Father's love,  
or basely fear his gifts to own?  
Unmindful of his favors prove,  
shall I, the hallowed cross to shun,  
refuse his righteousness to impart,  
by hiding it within my heart?
4. No—though the ancient Dragon rage  
and call forth all his hosts to war,  
Though earth's self-righteous sons engage;  
Them, and their God alike I dare:  
Jesus the sinner's Friend proclaim,  
Jesus, to sinners still the same.
5. Outcasts of men, to you I call,  
harlots and publicans and thieves;  
he spreads his arms to embrace you all,  
sinners alone his grace receives.  
No need of him the righteous have;  
he came the lost to seek and save.

6. Come, all ye Magdalens in lust,  
ye Ruffians fell in murders old;  
repent, and live; despair and trust!  
Jesus for you to death was sold;  
Though hell protest, and earth repine  
He died for crimes like yours—and mine.
  
7. Come, O my guilty brethren, come,  
groaning beneath your load of sin;  
his bleeding heart shall make you room,  
his open side shall take you in.  
He calls you now, invites you home:  
Come, O my guilty brethren, come.
  
8. For you the purple current flowed  
in pardon from his wounded side,  
languished for you the eternal God,  
for you the Prince of Glory died.  
Believe, and all your guilt's forgiven,  
only believe—and yours is heaven.

On May 24<sup>th</sup> Charles wrote in his Journal, “Towards ten, 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.” What an incredible picture of the two founders of the Methodist movement: both of their lives have been transformed and they stand together singing of being overcome with awe and wonder at what God has done for them, of having the desire to tell the story of redemption, and of beginning the work with the most unlikely people: prostitute, thieves, murderers.

They are awestruck that they “Should *know*, should *feel* [their] sins forgiven,” declare that they cannot hide this reality “within [their] heart,” and affirm what the Scripture is ever saying—that God’s mercy embraces *all* people no matter what their lot in life may be, for Christ “came the lost to seek and save!” They rehearse in song also the invitation that resounded from their heart, lips, and deeds for the remainder of their lives: Come, all who are “groaning beneath the load of sin.”

**Questions for discussion:**

1. Who are some of those persons in your own community who would be the most unlikely to hear anyone tell and live out the story of loving redemption?
2. How do we personify repentance, trust, and belief?
3. How do we make our lives an argument for Christ and the principle of caring for the marginalized?
4. How do we translate the picture of the founders of the Methodist movement standing in a room singing about transformation and ministry to the most unlikely persons into the present?

**Activity for Session 5:**

Ask each participant to examine Charles Wesley’s questions in the hymn “Where shall my wondering soul begin?” and to write a response to each of them. Share the responses first of all in groups of two or three and then with the whole group.

## Study Session 6: Act II, Scene 3: Accusations and Mob Violence

The 1740s were extremely troubled times, filled with suspicion of those averred to be disloyal to the Crown and to favor a Pretender to the throne of England. Many seized the opportunity to oppose the followers of the Wesleys who were slandered and violently attacked by unruly mobs on numerous occasions. Charles himself was labeled a rogue, rascal, villain, pickpocket, and even a representative of a Pretender to the throne, whom some thought to be his brother John disguised as a priest. Although the Wesleys persistently maintained their loyalty to the Crown, opposition mounted. It is miraculous that they were not killed by the raging mobs. At Walsal John was dragged by the hair from the steps of the cross down the main street, and Charles was attacked while preached from the market steps.

It is not surprising to find this hymn in Charles's *Hymns for Times of Trouble and Persecution* published in 1744. Charles Wesley knew the agony of severe persecution reflected in these lines and the necessity of standing firm in the faith against all opposition.

1. Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,  
and publish abroad his wonderful name;  
the name all-victorious of Jesus extol;  
his kingdom is glorious and rules over all.
2. God ruleth on high, almighty to save,  
and still he is nigh, his presence we have;  
the great congregation his triumph shall sing,  
ascribing salvation to Jesus, our King.
3. "Salvation to God, who sits on the throne!"  
Let all cry aloud and honor the Son;  
the praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,  
fall down on their faces and worship the Lamb.
4. Then let us adore and give him his right,  
all glory and power, all wisdom and might;  
all honor and blessing with angels above,  
and thanks never ceasing and infinite love.

Since the original stanzas 2 and 3 of this hymn are omitted in most hymnbooks, the life situation out of which the hymn was born is easily overlooked. They read as follows:

2. The waves of the sea have lift up their voice,  
sore troubled that we in Jesus rejoice;  
the floods they are roaring, but Jesus is here,  
while we are adoring, he always is near.
3. Men, devils engage, the billows arise,  
and horribly rage, and threaten the skies:  
their fury shall never our steadfastness shock,  
the weakest believer is built on a rock.

We live in an age filled with mobs, rioting, and wars. Wesley called followers of Jesus anew amid such trials to stand firm in their faith as champions of "infinite love." In the face political, economic, and social injustices, Christians around the world are beckoned to turn the

cries of agony and hatred into resounding praises of God. The love of God in Jesus is so transforming that it can change discriminatory laws, rectify the exploitation of the poor by the rich, provide shelter for the homeless, food for the hungry, and turn violence to compassion.

**Questions for discussion:**

1. How can injustices fall before God's love? Can you describe examples of this taking place in history and today?
2. What injustices do Christians face today that they perhaps did not face in Wesley's day?
3. How do Christians stand up against political, economic, social and religious injustice?

**Activity for Session 6:**

If the group is large enough, divide into two groups to depict a mob threat to the Wesley brothers and a group of their Methodist followers. Have the two groups face each other with at least ten to fifteen feet between them. Designate one group as the mob and the other as the Wesley / Methodist group. One of the Wesley group is to depict John or Charles Wesley lining out the hymn "Ye servants of God, / your Master proclaim," which the mob tries to drown with its cries and shouts, as the Wesley brothers and their group sing the hymn with confidence.

After the singing of the hymn is completed, have the two groups discuss their feelings that emerged in the course of the role playing.

Charles Wesley's mood swings from elation to despair are quite transparent and he lays them bare in his poetry and prose. He achieves balance in his life amid them, however, by relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to infuse his life with understanding and forbearance. Hence, even when he wonders where he will gain strength to go on in the face of opposition and resistance, he prays for God's Spirit to give him strength (see UMH #332). Stanzas 1, 2, 4, and 5 are used in *Sweet Singer*.

1. Spirit of faith, come down,  
    reveal the things of God,  
    and make to us the Godhead known,  
    and witness with the blood.  
'Tis thine the blood to apply  
    and give us eyes to see,  
    who did for every sinner die  
    hath surely died for me.
2. No one can truly say  
    that Jesus is the Lord,  
    unless thou take the veil away  
    and breathe the living Word.  
Then, only then, we feel  
    our interest in his blood,  
    and cry with joy unspeakable,  
    "Thou art my Lord, my God!"

3. I know my Savior lives,  
     he lives who died for me,  
     my inmost soul his voice receives  
     Who hangs on yonder tree.  
     Set forth before my eyes  
     ev'n now I see him bleed,  
     and hear his mortal groans and cries  
     while suffering in my stead.
  
4. O that the world might know  
     the all-atoning Lamb!  
     Spirit of faith, descend and show  
     the virtue of his name;  
     the grace which all may find,  
     the saving power, impart,  
     and testify to humankind,  
     and speak in every heart.
  
5. Inspire the living faith  
     (which whosoe'er receives,  
     the witness in himself he hath  
     and consciously believes),  
     the faith that conquers all,  
     and doth the mountains move,  
     and saves whosoe'er on Jesus call,  
     and perfects them in love.

In this hymn Wesley expresses four distinct needs of human beings in relation to the gift of the Holy Spirit: *revelation* (“give me eyes to see”), *recognition* (“Thou art my Lord my God”), *reclamation* (O that the world might know / the all-atoning Lamb”), and *regeneration* (“the faith that conquers all / and doth the mountains move”), that give balance to one’s life amid trials. It may seem rather strange that Wesley prays for the Spirit to “witness with the blood.” History tells us, however, that this is a human preoccupation. People in every age have tried to witness to some point, cause, or way of life by spilling the blood of others. Life today is haunted by terrorists representing political, national, and religious interests. They often seek to further their interests by “applying blood,” that is, by taking the lives of others, even children and infants. Such deaths are viewed by their perpetrators as effectual and purifying.

God’s Spirit, however, reveals to those who will hear the meaning of Christ’s death, how the witness of his blood was for all people so that they might understand how much God loves them and seek to live together in the spirit of that love.

**Questions for discussion:**

1. How would you interpret Charles’s words in stanza 1, “’Tis thine the blood to apply”?
2. Is Charles Wesley’s approach to dealing with his mood swings a viable approach today?
3. Is this an appropriate thing for a minister of the gospel to say?—“I live in continual storm. My soul is always in my hand. The enemy thrusts sore at me that I may fall; and a worse enemy than the devil is my own heart. . . . Why is it that next to feeling Christ present, the most desirable state is to feel Christ absent? This I often do.”

## Study Session 7: Act II, Scene 4: The Poor and Marriage

The field preaching of the brothers John and Charles Wesley, as well as that of fellow Anglican priest George Whitefield, brought them into contact with those who did not frequent the parish churches of the Church of England. They preached to coal miners and the workers of the blast furnaces of Newcastle. There were destitute poor people throughout the country and the Wesleys went to them where they were in an attempt to address their needs and to share the gospel of Christ. They built schools for coal miner's children, who received no education. They established orphanages for children without parents or a home. They went into the inner city workhouses where children and adults were exploited with no laws to protect them.

The eldest brother Samuel, who preceded Charles at Westminster School in London and later became headmaster of a school in Tiverton, early on had a vision of a medical dispensary for the poor in the Westminster section of London. Brother John indeed fulfilled the dream of a medical dispensary in London for the poor after purchasing an old canon factory, the Foundery, and remodeling it for use as a meeting house of the Methodist movement and other outreach activities.

In the fourth stanza of the hymn "Jesus, the gift divine I know" Charles Wesley lays out an unequivocal mandate for Christian behavior. We are to fly on the wings of mercy to relieve the poor and helpless and to give our all for them.

Thy mind throughout my life be shown,  
while listening to the sufferer's cry  
the widow's and the orphan's groan,  
on mercy's wings I swiftly fly  
the poor and helpless to relieve,  
my life, my all for them to give.

In another hymn he wrote what might be called the *social manifesto* of Methodism.

Work for the weak, and sick, and poor,  
raiment and food for them procure,  
and mindful of God's Word,  
enjoy the blessedness to give,  
lay out your gettings to relieve  
the members of your Lord.

### **Questions for discussion**

1. How should the mind of Christ be shown in our daily lives as his followers?
2. How does or should the church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century fulfill the *social manifesto* mentioned above?

### **Activity for Session 7:**

Divide once again into at least two groups of participants. The first is to discuss the stanza above which begins “Thy mind throughout my life be shown,” and the second is to discuss the immediately succeeding stanza of another hymn that begins “Work for the weak, and sick, and poor.” Both groups are to address the question: How should these lines shape the outreach of Methodism, indeed of all Christians?

### **Courtship and Marriage**

Charles knew that the loyalty of the Wesley brothers transcended many differences in their lives and he mentions the pact that he and John made that neither would marry without the other’s knowledge and consent. John indeed approved of Sarah Gwynne, Charles’s bride-to-be, and officiated at their wedding. Shortly before they married in February of 1749, Charles Wesley wrote to her these lines:

You have often heard me say that at first sight “My soul seemed pleased to take acquaintance with thee.” And never have I found such a nearness to any fellow-creature as to you. O that it may bring us nearer and nearer to God, till we are both swallowed up in the immensity of His love!<sup>2</sup>

One of the previously relatively unknown arenas of Charles’s poetry is that of his poems written to Sarah Gwynne during their courtship. Many of them were left unpublished at his death in a manuscript entitled “Courtship.” While they speak of his love for Sarah, they do not do so outside the context of divine love. The second stanza of “Love divine, all loves excelling” in Scene 4 of Act II comes from a letter written to Sarah from Cork on September 17, 1748 during their courtship and is not originally part of the well known hymn.. Charles published these lines in his two-volume work *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749). The poem in which it is included originally had five stanzas and John published four stanzas of them in *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodist* (1780).

Two are better far than one  
For counsel and for fight:  
How can one be warm alone,  
or serve his God aright?  
Join we then our hearts and hands,  
each to love provoke his friend,  
run the way of God’s commands,  
and keep them to the end.

Above all else Charles wanted to be “swallowed up” in God’s love, for all love begins, ends, and is fulfilled in that love. With this confidence he wrote one of the most meaningful and

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*, 55.

eloquent prayers for a love-filled life ever written, “Love divine, all loves excelling.” If we want to grow in love, this prayer hymn should be our daily guide (UMH 384).

1. Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven, to earth come down;  
fix in us thy humble dwelling;  
all thy faithful mercies crown!  
Jesus, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation;  
enter every trembling heart.
2. Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit  
into every trouble breast!  
Let us all in thee inherit;  
let us find the second rest.  
Take away our power of sinning;  
Alpha and Omega be;  
end of faith, as its beginning,  
set our hearts at liberty.
3. Come, Almighty to deliver,  
let us all thy life receive;  
suddenly return and never,  
nevermore thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,  
pray and praise thee without ceasing,  
glory in thy perfect love.
4. Finish, then, thy new creation;  
pure and spotless let us be.  
Let us see thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in thee;  
changed from glory into glory  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

This hymn provides guidance as to how we are to pray and grow in God’s love.

(1) *Acknowledge God as the source of unbounded, limitless love* (stanza 1). Pray to be the dwelling-place of God’s love; pray also for the indwelling of Christ.

(2) *Pray in the plural, not just in the singular* (stanza 2). Pray that the Holy Spirit will enter the lives of *others* so that every troubled breast will be set at liberty. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can be freed from the desire to do what is wrong and set free to love.

(3) *Pray for the reception of God’s grace* (stanza 3) that enables us to live the self-giving love expressed in Jesus Christ. When we receive God’s grace, we recognize that God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves: God reclaims our sinful lives and makes them new through Christ. When we live renewed lives, we begin to learn what it means to mature in love. Love takes priority over everything in our lives. There is no compromise.

(4) *Pray to be created new* (stanza 4) and to continue in the creative process toward maturity in love. Wesley understood that to finish the new creation means lifelong spiritual

growth. The ongoing process is defined by the word *till*, which designates the time between what has been and what will be, between *no longer* and *not yet*. He anticipates the time when we shall meet God in glory and be matured, new creatures in God's perfect love.

**Questions for discussion:**

1. What spiritual disciplines will aid the Christian to mature in love?
2. What is the relationship of human and love and God's love?
3. Do we have to *learn* to love or do human beings just love naturally?
4. What can we learn from Charles's courtship of Sarah Gwynne, as limited as our knowledge of that relationship may be from *Sweet Singer*?

**Activity for Session 7:**

Focus: "Love divine, all loves excelling"

Have the group name as many hymns as possible that address the subject of love. How many of them are by Charles Wesley? How does Wesley relate the concept of love to Holy Scripture? To human relationships?

Focus: Love Prayers

Next, divide into four groups if possible. Ask each group (or individual in the group) to write a prayer following one of Wesley's own principles for prayer guidance in the hymn "Love divine, all loves excelling."

(1) *Acknowledge God as the source of unbounded, limitless love* (stanza 1).

(2) *Pray in the plural, not just in the singular* (stanza 2).

(3) *Pray for the reception of God's grace* (stanza 3).

(4) *Pray to be created new* (stanza 4).

Share the prayers with the whole group.

*Act II, Scene 5: The Children*

At this juncture we shall address this scene, as well as the first part of Scene 7, since the latter also has to do with the children. Charles and Sarah had eight children, but only three of them survived the first year of life, Samuel, Charles, Jr., and Sarah or Sally. Both of the sons were gifted musicians and the daughter a gifted poet.

At his death Charles left behind a manuscript entitled "Nursery." It contains a series of poems that he wrote simply to entertain his children. It is delightful to see this side of the poet-priest with a twinkle in his eye turning a phrase for sheer amusement. Such is the case with the poem, "A Battle of Cats."

I sing Grimalkin grave and bold,  
who makes intruders fly,  
his claws and whiskers they behold,  
and squawl and scamper by.

The fiercest cats before his power,  
fly swifter than the wind,  
over the walls and houses scour  
and leave their coat behind.

Their coat I will preserve from harm  
as a victorious trophy:  
'Twill keep Mama so pure and warm  
or make a muff for Sophy.

A smile it will from sister gain,  
a kiss from Hetty Farley,  
and rouse into a tuneful strain  
the jealousy of Charley.

Charles also had a deep concern for the growth of Christian faith in children and hence he wrote a collection of hymns or poems with the title *Hymns for Children*. The hymn “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,” a portion of which appears in Scene 7, “The Letter,” originally had 14 stanzas and was first published in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742). Stanzas 1, 8, and 13 are used in Scene 7. The entire poem reads as follows:

1. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild  
look upon a little child,  
pity my simplicity,  
suffer me to come to thee.
2. Fain I would to thee be brought,  
dearest God, forbid it not,  
give me, dearest God, a place  
in the kingdom of thy grace.
3. Put thy hands upon my head,  
let me in thine arms be stayed,  
let me lean upon thy breast,  
lull me, lull me, Lord, to rest.
4. Hold me fast in thy embrace,  
let me see thy smiling face,  
give me, Lord, thy blessing, give,  
pray for me, and I shall live.
5. I shall live the simple life,  
free from sin's uneasy strife,  
sweetly ignorant of ill,  
innocent, and happy still.
6. O that I may never know  
what the wicked people do,  
sin is contrary to thee,  
sin is the forbidden tree.
7. Keep me from the great offense,  
guard my helpless innocence;  
hide me, from all evil, hide,  
self, and stubbornness, and pride
8. Lamb of God, I look to thee,  
thou shalt my example be;  
thou art gentle, meek, and mild,  
thou wast once a little child.

9. Fain I would be as thou art,  
give me thy obedient heart;  
thou art pitiful and kind,  
let me have thy loving mind.
  
10. Meek, and lowly may I be,  
thou art all humility;  
let me to my betters bow,  
subject to thy parents thou.
  
11. Let me above all fulfill  
God my heavenly Father's will,  
Never his good Spirit grieve,  
Only to his glory live.
  
12. Thou didst live to God alone,  
thou didst never seek thine own;  
thou thyself didst never please,  
God was all thy happiness.
  
13. Loving Jesus, gentle Lamb,  
in thy gracious hands I am,  
make me, Savior, what thou art,  
live thyself within my heart.
  
14. I shall then show forth thy praise,  
serve thee all my happy days;  
then the world shall always see  
Christ, the Holy Child in me.

Most certainly the hymn/poem is written in 18<sup>th</sup> century English and perhaps some of Charles's ideas may seem strange to contemporary child psychology and Christian nurture of children. Nevertheless, if read in context, the spirit of what Charles is trying to say is that God has created all children with the gift to see life as God intends it to be, free of evil, and lived in humble simplicity honoring God the Creator.

**Questions for discussion:**

1. What are the positive aspects of child nurture found in Wesley's poem, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild"? Are there negative ones as well?
2. How would you relate "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild" to "Love divine, all loves excelling"?

**Activity for Session 7:**

In small groups describe and discuss Charles Wesley's views of children and their nurture. Are his views viable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

## Study Session 8:

### *Act II, Scene 6: London and G. F. Handel*

We have no record of actual encounters between Charles Wesley and George F. Handel, the distinguished composer and conductor. The connection between the two, however, is more than coincidental. Handel was a conductor at the Covent Garden Opera House in London, when John Rich was its proprietor. Rich's wife, an actress, became affiliated with the Methodist movement in London and perhaps it is through her that the connection with Handel emerged. What we know definitively is that Handel wrote musical settings specifically for three of Charles Wesley's texts and the manuscripts are in the Fitzsimmons Library in London. One of them is the tune GOPSAL, used in *Sweet Singer*, written for the text "Rejoice, the Lord is King!" (UMH 716).

1. Rejoice, the Lord is King!  
Your Lord and King adore;  
mortals, give thanks and sing,  
and triumph evermore.

*Refrain:*

Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;  
rejoice; again I say, rejoice.

2. Jesus the Savior reigns,  
the God of truth and love;  
when he had purged our stains,  
he took his seat above.  
*Refrain*

3. His kingdom cannot fail;  
he rules o'er earth and heaven;  
the keys of death and hell  
are to our Jesus given.  
*Refrain*

4. Rejoice in glorious hope!  
Jesus the Judge shall come,  
and take his servants up  
to their eternal home.

*Refrain*

We soon shall hear th'archangel's voice;  
the trump of God shall sound, rejoice.

Rejoicing, that shall mark the raising of the dead at the sound of the trumpet, is interpreted by Wesley as the vocation of every follower of Jesus: "mortals, give thanks and sing, / and triumph evermore." *Give thanks, sing, and triumph*—the marks of daily life of those who live out Christ's sacrificial love for others and all creation. What greater definition of the vocation of doxology can there be than this Wesley hymn!

We also know that Wesley wrote two poems about G. F. Handel. On the occasion of the composer's birthday, he wrote these lines:

Hail the bright auspicious day  
that gave immortal Handel birth.  
Let every moment glide away  
in solemn joy and sacred mirth;  
let every soul like his aspire  
And catch a glowing spark of pure etherial fire.

On the enduring quality of Handel's compositions he penned the following quatrain:

Here all the mystic powers of sound,  
the soul of harmony is found,  
its perfect character receives,  
and Handel dead for ever lives.

**Questions for discussion:**

1. Read "Rejoice, the Lord is King!" and discuss the question: Why should Christians rejoice?
2. Is Wesley's assertion that God's "kingdom cannot fail" a realistic assertion? Why?
3. How can Christians rejoice when so many in the world are in despair from hunger, poverty, violence, and war?
4. What is the relationship of doxological vocation and Christian caring concern for others?

**Activity for Session 8:**

Ask each participant to make a list of the main points of Wesley's understanding of the vocation of doxology or praise found in the hymn "Rejoice, the Lord is King!" Then ask each person to make another list of his/her average daily activities. Afterwards put the two lists side by side and describe how they are to be integrated with each other.

*Act II, Scene 7: The Letter*

Charles Wesley wrote many letters to his children and the one he supposedly concludes at the end of *Sweet Singer* is an imaginary one. At the beginning of the musical drama he had begun a letter to his children as though it might be his last. After going through the many reminiscences of his life, he sits down to complete the letter. The impression is left, however, that he does not complete a prose letter at all. The greatest legacy he leaves his children and the world is his poetry. Hence, he leaves them a poem, which he completes. In reflecting on the central focus of his life, he reads two lines from "Hark! the herald angels sing," the poem he supposedly completes in this letter to his children: "Peace on earth and mercy mild, / God and sinners reconciled." Then he says, "I have spent my life singing that song."

Before turning to this powerful hymn, however, let us examine the prayer he prays after completing the letter. Stanzas 2, 5, and 7 of the hymn below are used in *Sweet Singer*. It was first

published in *Hymns for those that seek and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Christ* (1747) with the title “The Musician’s Hymn.”

1. Thou God of harmony and love,  
whose name transports the saints above,  
and lulls the ravished spheres:  
On thee in feeble strains I call,  
and mix my humble voice with all  
the heavenly choristers.
2. If well I know the tuneful art  
to captivate an human heart,  
the glory, Lord, be thine.  
A servant of thy blessed will,  
I here devote my utmost skill  
to sound the praise divine.
3. With Tubal’s wretched songs no more  
I prostitute my sacred power,  
to please the fiends beneath;  
or modulate the wanton lay,  
or smooth with music’s hand the way  
to everlasting death.
4. Suffice for this the season past:  
I come, great God, to learn at last  
the lesson of thy grace;  
teach me the new, the gospel song,  
and let my hand, my heart, my tongue,  
move only to thy praise.
5. Thine own musician, Lord, inspire,  
and let my consecrated lyre  
repeat the Psalmist’s part;  
his Son and thine reveal in me,  
and fill with sacred melody  
the fibres of my heart.
6. So shall I charm the listening throng,  
and draw the living stones along,  
by Jesu’s tuneful name:  
The living stones shall dance, shall rise,  
and form a city in the skies,  
the New Jerusalem!
7. O might I with thy saints aspire,  
The meanest of that dazzling choir  
Who chant thy praise above!  
Mixt with the bright musician band  
May I an heavenly harper stand,  
And sing the song of love.

8. What ecstasy of bliss is there,  
while all th'angelic concert share,  
and drink the floating joys!  
what more than ecstasy, when all  
struck to the golden pavement fall  
at Jesu's glorious voice!
  
9. Jesus, the heaven of heaven he is,  
the soul of harmony and bliss!  
and while on him we gaze,  
and while his glorious voice we hear,  
our spirits are all eye, all ear,  
and silent speaks his praise.
  
10. O might I die that awe to prove,  
that prostrate awe which dares not move,  
before the great Three-One;  
to shout by turns the bursting joy,  
and all eternity employ  
in songs around the throne.

**Activity for Session 8:**

In the light of "The Musician's Hymn" list the qualities that should characterize the music of worship? How does the list compare with what takes place in the worship of your own church or congregation? Favorably? Unfavorably?

*Epilogue*

Finally we come to the *Epilogue* and the conclusion of *Sweet Singer* and to one of Wesley's most famous hymn texts, "Hark! the herald angels sing" (UMH 240), stanzas 1, 3, and 6 of which are used in *Sweet Singer*.

1. Hark! the herald angels sing,<sup>3</sup>  
"Glory to the new-born King,  
peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled!"
  
2. Joyful, all ye nations rise,  
join the triumph of the skies,  
with th'angelic host proclaim,  
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
  
3. Christ by highest heaven adored;  
Christ, the everlasting Lord;  
late in time behold him come,  
offspring of the virgin's womb.
  
4. Veiled in flesh the God-head see;  
hail th'incarnate Deity,  
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

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<sup>3</sup> Wesley's original opening couplet reads, "Hark how all the Welkin rings, / 'Glory to the King of Kings'".

5. Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Son of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all he brings,  
risen with healing in his wings.
6. Mild he lays his glory by,  
born that we no more may die,  
born to raise us from the earth,  
born to give us second birth.
7. Come, Desire of Nations, come,  
fix in us thy humble home,  
rise, the woman's conquering seed,  
bruise in us the serpent's head.
8. Now display thy saving power,  
ruined nature now restore,  
now in mystic union join  
thine to ours, and ours to thine.
9. Adam's likeness, Lord, efface,  
stamp thy image in its place,  
Second Adam from above,  
reinstale us in thy love.
10. Let us thee, though lost, regain,  
thee, the life, the inner man:  
O! to all thyself impart,  
Formed in each believing heart.

Stanza 5 is a *Manifesto of Peace* for all time and ages! Yet, the world has not been bold to believe that the reign of One who brings peace has come. Wesley understood that God's world was made for peace and harmony, not violence and discord. The bearer of peace and the bearer of righteousness are one and the same! What if our world really believed that what God desires for all is "light and life" not darkness and death? Suppose the nations and peoples of the world would lay aside their glory and become "mild" like the One who comes bringing peace. Imagine a world that comes to realize that there need be no more death, destruction, and dying, for the Bringer of Peace, even Christ, was "born that we no more may die!" There is no place for enmity, war, violence, anger, etc., for the "Prince of Peace" has come bringing light and life to all. God awaits our second birth and transformation into the peacemakers and reconcilers of this earth filled with "mercy mild" toward all. God hasten that day!

**Questions for discussion:**

1. How do we interpret the Christian's vocation of doxology today? (See the "The Musician's Hymn" above).
2. What is the primary meaning of "Hark! the herald angels sing"?
3. Can there be peace on earth?
4. How can Christians be known as peacemakers?

## A Charles Wesley Time Line

1707	Dec. 18	born at Epworth
1709	Feb. 9	rescued from Epworth Rectory fire
1716		enters Westminster School
1726		enters Christ Church College, Oxford
1730		receives B.A. degree, becomes tutor at Oxford
1733		receives M.A. degree
1735	Apr. 25	Father Samuel dies.
	Sept. 21	ordained deacon of the Church of England by Dr. John Potter, Bishop of Oxford
	Sept. 24	appointed secretary for Indian Affairs, American colony of Georgia
	Sept. 29	ordained priest of the Church of England by Dr. Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London
	Oct. 14	Charles and John embark at Gravesend on the ship <i>Simmonds</i> for Georgia; during the voyage they encounter on board the Moravians' deep Christian faith and singing.
1736	Feb. 5	lands in Savannah
	March	proceeds to Frederica where he takes up his ministry
	March 9	begins his <i>Journal</i>
	July 26	leaves Georgia overland for Charles-town where he embarks for England; becomes severely ill on board; the ship docks for repairs in Boston
	Dec. 3	lands in Deal, England and proceeds to London
1737		meets Moravian leader, Count Zinzendorf, in London
1738		meets Moravian Peter Böhler whom he begins teaching English
	Apr. 3	resigns his Georgia secretaryship
	May 21	Charles Wesley experiences "conversion."
	May 24	John Wesley has transforming experience at Aldersgate Society Meeting.
1739		begins major publications with John: <i>Hymns and Sacred Poems</i> ;
		first Methodist house of worship is established: "New Room" at Bristol
	May 29	preaches in fields for first time
	Nov. 6	Brother Samuel dies.
1742		preaches in north of England with brother John for first time; establish their first orphanage and Sunday School
	July 23	Mother Susanna dies.
1747	Sept. 9 - March 20, 1748	visits Ireland for first time
1748	Aug. 13 - Oct. 8	visits Ireland for second time
1749		publishes, without John's editorial assistance, a two-volume work, <i>Hymns and Sacred Poems</i>
	Apr. 8	marries Sarah Gwynne; officiant is brother John
	Sept. 1	acquires house in Charles Street, Bristol
1752	Aug.	Son, John Wesley, is born (Note: Charles and Sarah Wesley had eight

- children, but only three—Charles, Jr., Sarah, and Samuel—survived infancy and childhood.)
- 1755 Conference is held at which separation of Methodist societies from the Church of England is intensely debated; Charles strongly urges unity.
- 1756 ends itinerant ministry and settles in Bristol; Conference reaffirms unity of the Methodist societies and the Church of England.
- 1757 Dec. 11 Son Charles is born.
- 1759 Daughter Sarah is born.
- 1762 publishes, without John's editorial assistance, *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* (2 vols.)
- 1771 begins preaching regularly in London and moves to Chesterfield Street, Marylebone, London
- 1778 City Road Chapel, London is opened.
- 1788 Mar. 29 Charles Wesley dies.
- Apr. 5 Charles Wesley is buried in Marylebone churchyard.
- 1822 Dec. 22 Mrs. Charles (Sarah) Wesley dies.