



FREE TO BE

Children's Ministry Curriculum
and Resources about our History and Identity as
the Free Methodist Church

This curriculum is designed for Free Methodist churches to use to teach children what it means to be a Christian in the Free Methodist Church. Each lesson focuses on one aspect of our denomination's identity and history. These four lessons could be used for a 4-8 week focused time of teaching, as stand-alone lessons, or to supplement any curriculum or event. (For example, you may choose to use Lesson 2 (Free to be Equal) on Freedom Sunday.) We also tried to jam pack these lessons with lots of ideas for you to use any time throughout the year to create opportunities for your children and their families to engage in learning and serving.

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All Scriptures quoted are NIV 2011, unless otherwise noted.

JESUS MADE A WAY FOR US TO BE FRIENDS WITH GOD FOREVER.

Key Lesson Element: *The Story of John Wesley*

Core Scriptures: *Psalm 130; Romans 5:1-11; James 1:18-22*

Suggested Lesson Plan

We have intentionally provided multiple activity options. Choose whichever you think will work best for your time, space, and students' learning styles.

Elements that we think are essential to this lesson are marked with an asterisk.

- **Choose one or two intro activity options.**
- **Read and engage children in the story of John Wesley's life through one or more lesson activities.**
- **Discuss questions as a large group or in smaller groups.**
- **Closing activity options are listed if you have time.**
- **Be sure to send home take-home materials.**

Suggested Supplies

Intro Activities

- **Bare Feet** No supplies needed
- **Sing** Device that can play music or display an online video
- **Read** Bibles or printed Bible handouts

Story of John Wesley: *Pictures available in Additional Resources folder*

Activity Options

- **Act it Out** Stool or chair, red plastic table cloth, etc
- **Messy Walk** Pudding, pieces of foam, Pebbles cereal, etc
- **"I am Free"** Device that can play music or display an online video
- **Traveling Circuit Tag** No supplies needed. Make sure you have plenty of space.
- **Sharing the Gospel** Wordless bracelet kit or colored pony beads and cord or hemp

Take Home Papers

Intro Activities

- o ***Leader wears bare feet into session.** When kids comment, tell them in today's story you will be sharing about someone who impacted kids lives by going barefooted. Other kids may also take their shoes off, if they would like. This is important for today's lesson!
- o **Sing** "I am Free" by the Newsboys. (Play music or watch a video made available online.)
- o **Read** Romans 5:6-8 and Psalm 130 together.

***The Story of John Wesley** (20-25 minutes, plus additional activities)

Read the story. Pictures are included for PowerPoint slides or print-outs. Activity ideas noted and explained throughout. Choose activities that will engage your students. An additional activity option is also listed after the story.

Read: John Wesley was born in 1703 in Epworth, England to Reverend Samuel and Susanna Wesley. He had 18 brothers and sisters! Wow! Does anyone here have that many siblings? They all lived in a little cottage. They learned to share and to be grateful for every meal they had. His mother made time for each child, spending one hour a week alone with each of them to talk about God and answer their questions.

One night, when John was a young boy, he awoke to strange sounds and smells. He heard shouting and a crackling noise, and smelled smoke! The house was on fire! The other children were following the nurse downstairs out of the cottage. John got up to go when suddenly- bang! The wind blew the door shut! He opened it and the flames leapt up at him. He pushed the door shut and got to a window. He pushed and pushed and finally the window opened. John cried out and his parents looked up in horror. John's mother tried to rush into the burning house but others held her back because no one could get up the burning stairs. His father tried to reach him but couldn't. They dropped to their knees and prayed. A strong boy climbed on a man's shoulders next to the cottage, and they were finally able to bring John down safely before the cottage collapsed.

His parents hugged him tightly and thanked God. They said, "John has been snatched as a brand from the burning." A brand was a stick used to start a fire. This was a reference to Zechariah 3:2. This meant that John had been saved from the fire just in time. It also refers to God saving us from the consequences of our sin. God had plans to use John Wesley in wonderful ways for His Kingdom. He has plans for you, too!

Zechariah 3:2

The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"

Activity: Act it Out (8 minutes)

Act out the story of John Wesley being saved from the fire. You could have a child stand on a stool to be above the others. Two other children could wave a red plastic table cloth held at both ends in front of "little John" to simulate the flames. You can choose to use additional children or adults as Mother, Father, those that reached him, other children, etc.

Read: When he was 11, John got a scholarship to go away to school. It was difficult because there was lots of bullying of the younger boys like John. But the younger boys liked him because he was such a good storyteller.

Later, John went to Oxford University to study, where his brother Charles joined him. John had a daily schedule to spend his time wisely so he could study well, but also so he could spend time helping the needy around him. He saw that they were poor in money, but also poor in goodness and mercy and spiritual growth. Charles got together a group of students who wanted to be serious about studying about God and helping others, including those in prison and the poor. This group came to be called the Holy Club. John also joined the Holy Club, and brought his methodical way of doing things. That means that he had a planned way of doing things, instead of being disorganized or doing things whenever he felt like it. Other young men teased them and called them the Methodists. That's how the Methodist church got its name! What the mean young men intended as a curse, God turned into a blessing!

In 1735, John and Charles sailed to America as missionaries. John wanted to convert the Native Americans, but he was assigned to be the colony pastor. He struggled in preaching to the adults, because he felt they had little interest and showed no change in their lives. And he often did not know how to speak the truth in love, as it says in Ephesians 4:15, which made people angry with him.

But John always made friends with the children. He and his brother Charles started the first Sunday School. **Now I will share with you the story of why I came barefoot today:**

Read: One morning, the Sunday School teacher told John that the poorer kids were no longer attending Sunday School. He thought it was because the richer boys made fun of the others for going barefoot. (They were too poor to buy shoes.) John Wesley knew what it was like to be teased. He told him "I'll teach the class today." So he took off his socks and shoes, and walked barefoot to the place where they held Sunday School. He had his dark, serious Sunday Suit on and was very proper, except for being barefoot. The boys stared at his feet. "Look," they whispered, "the Pastor is barefoot!" You can imagine that his feet were dirty and cold from walking on the dirt paths and roads. John didn't say anything about it. He just taught his lesson. Every Sunday, he came like this. After a while, the poorer boys heard about it and decided to come back, and the other boys started to be ashamed of their cruel teasing. So the children liked John Wesley very much.

Ephesians 4:15

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

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Read: John Wesley was discouraged and went back to England feeling like he had not done well for God in America. He had made friends with Moravian Christians and was curious about them because they always seemed so joyful, including their children, even through hard trials. You see, John wanted to please God, and save souls, but he was trying to do it in his own strength. He wasn't understanding that only the power of God can change people's hearts and lives. Our efforts, our words, our good works won't do it alone. It takes the Holy Spirit in us to transform those good things we do into life-changing power. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives when we believe in Jesus' death and resurrection alone to save us from our sins. Back in England, John was seeking the joy he saw in those other Christians. He visited a Bible Study in a town called Aldersgate. They were reading about the book of Romans in the Bible. Let's read from the chapter they were studying...

Activity Option: Messy Walk (10 minutes)

Allow kids to walk barefoot across something messy (pudding could be a reminder of animal poo, pieces of foam or Pebbles cereal might represent rocks, slime, dirt, etc. Discuss what John Wesley was willing to do to share the Gospel with others.

Isaiah 52:7

How beautiful are the feet of those that bring Good News.

*** Read Romans 5:6-8 together.**

*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless,
Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person though
for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.
But God demonstrates his own love for us in this While we were still sinners, Christ
died for us.*

Read: Later John would share with others, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given to me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Remember when John was saved from that fire when he was little? Well, believing in Jesus alone was his spiritual "being plucked as a brand from the burning." He was saved from his sin to live a life with Jesus that didn't depend on whether he was good enough, but on the free gift of forgiveness of Jesus.

Activity: "I am Free" (3 minutes)

Sing "I am Free" by the Newsboys. (Play music or watch a video made available online.)

Read: John Wesley and his brother Charles continued to disciple others and lead Methodist Societies in London, to pray, praise, and help the poor. Then, God led John Wesley to start to preach to people in the countryside, outdoors, like

Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. The first time John Wesley spoke outdoors it was to 3,000 people!! He didn't have a microphone or a sound system like today. He just had to rely on God to make the people hear and understand it. And God did!! John Wesley learned over and over that our God is a faithful God. He rode thousands of miles a year on horseback (as many as 20,000 a year), preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit rather than relying on his own words and deeds, as he had done before his Aldersgate experience.

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Activity: *Traveling Circuit Tag* (10 minutes)

John Wesley, and many other early pastors and evangelists preached on a traveling circuit. This means that the preacher would travel by walking or riding from one congregation (church) to another. We're going to play a tag game where the person being changed will travel from group to group. Here's how to play: Everyone links arms with one or two partners. Two people are selected to be the chaser and the chasee. The chaser tries to tag the chasee before s/he links arms with someone. When s/he links arms with someone, the person who was originally linked to that person becomes the chasee. If the chaser tags the chasee, they switch positions (the chaser becomes the chasee).

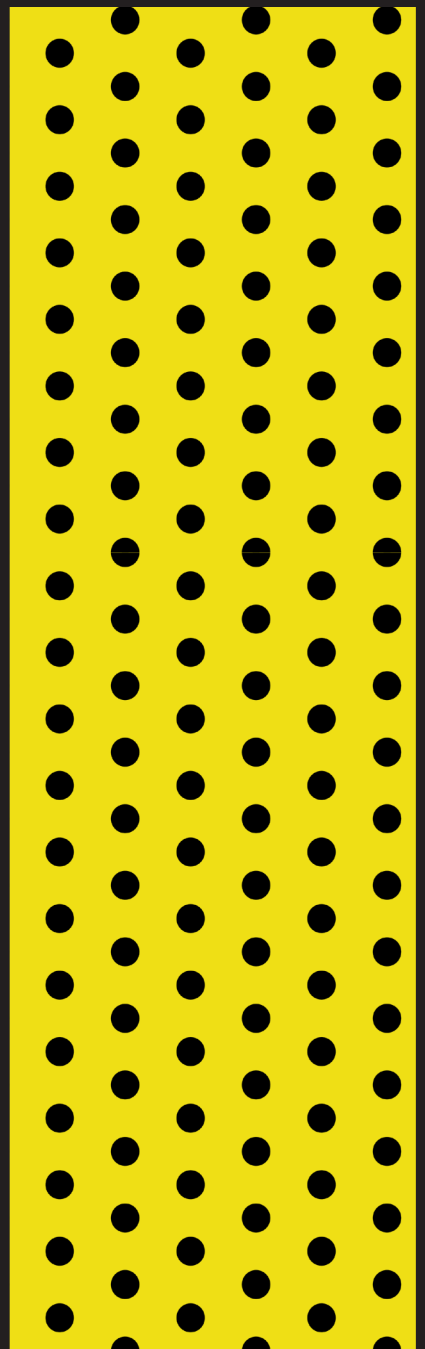
Read: John wanted to share Jesus with people that couldn't, or wouldn't, come to a church. Many people felt God didn't care about them. So John preached outdoors, and in mining towns that others considered dangerous, and in prisons. He urged people to help their neighbors and the poor. He lived simply himself so that he could give what he could to help others. Wherever he preached, people's hearts were changed when they believed in Jesus as their Savior. And their communities changed, too. They cared about each other, helped each other out, and stopped hurting and stealing from each other. Kids loved to follow John Wesley on horseback, singing hymns as he went.

But things were often difficult. Some people didn't want to hear of trusting Jesus with their whole lives. Some didn't want to help or educate the poor. Some didn't even think everyone was equal in God's eyes. Sometimes there were mobs or riots where he and Charles preached. Some people were scared to stand up for them and for the Gospel, because they thought they would get hurt. But God had shown John that He was faithful and He brought him through it all, sometimes in amazing ways!

(You may choose to share other examples of people standing up for God, or ask kids to share)

Read: John Wesley helped to establish the Methodist Church in America after the Revolutionary War. He fought against the slave trade. He opened dispensaries where poor people could get medicine free from charge. He rode on horseback sharing the Good News of Jesus' free gift of salvation until he was 70 years old. On March 2, 1791, at the age of 88, John Wesley passed away, into the arms of Jesus. God had used him to do exciting and difficult things on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. His last words were: "The best of all is, God is with us." Pray, giving thanks to God for the gift of salvation.

Pray for the salvation of your students, their friends, peers, and families. Pray for the students to walk by faith and have the courage to share the Good News of God's free gift of grace like John Wesley did.



Discussion Questions (5-10 minutes)

Discuss these questions as a whole group or break into smaller groups.

1. How did John Wesley try to please God with his life?
2. Have you ever been ridiculed for your faith like John Wesley?
3. What changed for John Wesley after Aldersgate?
4. How did people react to this new message?
5. Why did John Wesley fail in Georgia?

Go deeper...

6. Where do you see yourself in John Wesley's life? Do you see yourself in a place before he came to know Jesus as his Lord and Savior, or after?
7. How does our church compare with the teachings or early life of John Wesley?
8. How do you think our church is influenced by John Wesley's life?

Additional Activity: *Sharing the Gospel* (10 minutes)

One method you could use to help kids share their faith is to create a "Steps to Salvation Bead Bracelet," otherwise known as a "Witness Bracelet." Go over this with your kids to offer an opportunity for children to make a decision for Jesus. If they already have made this decision, this is can be a great opportunity to practice sharing the gospel with others. If you have a large group, it might be best to divide up into smaller groups for a more intimate time for discussion.

Wordless bracelet kits can be ordered online from Oriental Trading or Christianbook.com or you can create your own with colored pony beads and cord or hemp. See the included instruction and tract resource from worldchangerkids.org. *Note: Colors vary slightly from resource to resource.*

Black represents our sin

Red represents the blood of Jesus

White represents forgiveness and cleansing of our sin

Blue represents water baptism, a sign of our faith in Jesus

Green represents our new life in Jesus Christ and Christian growth

Gold represents heaven



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Torchlighter: The John Wesley Story** Check out this video for kids about the life of John Wesley. Videos are available for purchase, but are also available on RightNow Media and Amazon Prime Video. Free curriculum resources, including coloring and activity pages, and online activities can be found at www.torchlighters.org.
- **John Wesley** a Children's Book by May McNeer and Lynd Ward
- **Teaching Kids about What it Means to Follow Jesus** Article found in Resource Folder
- **Witness Bracelet Instructions** from worldchangerkids.org available in Additional Resources Folder

EVENT IDEAS

Engage your entire church family or community through one or more of these ideas.

- **Holy Club Activity:** Charles and John Wesley started "Holy Clubs" in Oxford. Members would help the poor and disadvantaged. Choose a project for your own "Holy Club" during this study series. For example, you might choose to cook a meal together for a shut-in or ill person, do some chores for elderly or other persons in need, make Blessings Bags to hand out to the homeless that families encounter on street corners, or do a missions project together.
- **John Wesley Play/Video:** Perform a play or make a video telling the story of John Wesley's life for your entire church congregation. (Additional idea: Include hymns in your production by Charles Wesley such as "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing," "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus," "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!" and "Christ the Lord is Risen Today." There are many more. (In fact, he wrote 6,000!) Be sure to include hymns your congregation is familiar with if you choose to include hymns.)
- **Host a John Wesley trivia night.**
- Instead of simply encouraging family's to pack their own **Blessing Bags**, collect donations and host an event to pack and pray over these bags as a group.

THE STORY OF JOHN WESLEY

John Wesley was born in 1703 in Epworth, England to Reverend Samuel and Susanna Wesley. He had 18 brothers and sisters! They all lived in a little cottage. They learned to share and to be grateful for every meal they had. His mother made time for each child, spending one hour a week alone with each of them to talk about God and answer their questions.

One night, when John was a young boy, he awoke to strange sounds and smells. He heard shouting and a crackling noise, and smelled smoke! The house was on fire! The other children were following the nurse downstairs out of the cottage. John got up to go when suddenly- bang! The wind blew the door shut! He opened it and the flames leapt up at him. He pushed the door shut and got to a window. He pushed and pushed and finally the window opened. John cried out and his parents looked up in horror. John's mother tried to rush into the burning house but others held her back because no one could get up the burning stairs. His father tried to reach him but couldn't. They dropped to their knees and prayed. A strong boy climbed on a man's shoulders next to the cottage, and they were finally able to bring John down safely before the cottage collapsed.

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Discussion Questions from today's lesson

1. How did John Wesley try to please God with his life?
2. Have you ever been ridiculed for your faith like John Wesley?
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Go deeper...

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BLESSING BAGS

John Wesley cared deeply for the poor and sought to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with them. As a family, pack a **Blessing Bag** to give to the homeless. As you pack this bag, discuss as a family other ways we can pray for and bless those who are in great need. As we discussed in our lesson, God loves everyone and we have an opportunity to share His love and truth. You may choose to donate your Blessing Bag(s) to an organization or carry it with you and pray that God would open your eyes for an opportunity to bless a homeless individual or family. When you give your Blessing Bag, be sure to pray for the individual/family and share the Gospel, as the Holy Spirit leads you.

Blessing Bag Checklist

Use the list below for ideas on what to include in your Blessing Bag. Be sure to consider your location, the time of year, etc. Use a gallon-sized Ziploc bag to ensure items stay dry. *(Pictures and list ideas used with permission from www.thriftynorthwestmom.com)*

General

- ☐ Gallon-sized Ziploc Bags
- ☐ Hand-Warmers
- ☐ Bottle(s) of Water
- ☐ Band-Aids
- ☐ Baby Wipes
- ☐ Wash Cloth
- ☐ First-Aid Kit

Toiletries (Travel-size and/or sample sizes are a great idea)

- ☐ Toothbrush
- ☐ Toothpaste
- ☐ Floss
- ☐ Soap
- ☐ Deodorant
- ☐ Shampoo/Conditioner
- ☐ Comb
- ☐ Personal Hygiene items
- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ Chapstick
- ☐ Razor
- ☐ Shaving Cream

Personal Items

- ☐ New Socks
- ☐ New Underwear
- ☐ Inexpensive gloves

Non-Perishable Food

- ☐ Granola Bars
- ☐ Energy Bars
- ☐ Instant Oatmeal Packets
- ☐ Tuna/Cracker Packs
- ☐ Trail Mix
- ☐ Raisins
- ☐ Peanuts
- ☐ Beef Jerky sticks
- ☐ Fruit Cup/Applesauce
- ☐ Gum/Hard Candy
- ☐ Instant Noodles

Extras

- ☐ Note of Encouragement
- ☐ List of Local Resources

