

# **I Have a Secret**

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I have a secret. I am guessing that most of you don't know my secret. I keep it close to my heart. During my first church internship many years ago I quickly discovered that church secretaries are the usually the first to find me out, Milly, here at Lakewood is no exception. While I can keep my secret from most in the congregation, at each new church I have been a part of the secretary is always quick to catch on.

In the spirit of honesty and humility I am going to let you in on my little secret, will you promise not to tell? Okay here it goes, I am not an organized person. I try diligently to make lists, keep calendars up to date, and ensure that my piles at least have some kind of order to them. For proof, just ask Jim Ward, who often times here's me ranting and raving as I try to locate a missing document. He however, isn't usually much help. I most often manage to show up at all the places that I am expected to be, but those that have seen my calendar know that it isn't easy for me, and it certainly doesn't come naturally.

Will you pray with me.

Gracious God, be with me today. Be with each one gathered here. Let your words and your spirit flow from me and into your people that they might feel your presence through me.

Many of you may not know a great deal about the roots of the Methodist church and that is okay, but today we are going to go back in time and study one of the important elements of the people that would eventually be called the Methodists.

Methodism as we know it today has had a long and winding history thus there isn't a date that we can't point to as Methodism actual origin. We do know that according to John Wesley's diary a group of four Oxford University students, including John's brother Charles Wesley, William Morgan, and Bob Kirkham, started meeting regularly in 1729 and had a set schedule developed by the spring of 1730. The group organized to study classic literature and theological writings; they attended church together, and at the prompting of Morgan, they soon began visiting a local prison as a part of their weekly routine.

Schedule, routine and organization have been the operative words. Again, according to John's diary, the group established an agenda quite early on, "evening meetings on Tuesdays at Charles's rooms, Thursdays at Kirkham's, Saturday's at John's, and Sunday's at Morgan's." As the group developed they added more people, like John Clayton, who added fasting to their regime. As well

as adding more causes, like helping children to be educated and the elderly to be cared for.

In addition to a strict routine The Oxford Boys, as they have become known by, cared a great deal about the ways in which they spent their time. Wesley saw time as a gift and as such made sure to make use of it as though tomorrow might never come. In a sermon entitled "*The Use of Money*," he puts it this way, "And so whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with might. Do it as soon as possible. No delay! No putting off from day to day, or from hour to hour. Never leave anything till tomorrow which you can today. And do it as well as possible."

In fact in 1974 John's diary takes on a new form called the "exacter diary." In addition to the usual record of his reading, visiting, conversing and other activities he adds a description of how he spends every hour including the resolutions he broke and a rating of his devotion.

In a University setting where most students did the bare minimum to sneak by and spent a great deal of their time in the pub it did not take long for a group of this sort to get noticed. However, it wasn't necessarily positive attention. The group had several derogatory nicknames, like Bible-Moths, The Godly Club, and the Holy Club, which ended up being a nickname that stuck for quite some time. Even the name Methodist, which Wesley never really cared for, or adopted, means "a person devoted to some method or laying great stress on method." Further, when William Morgan passed away in 1732 rumors spread that the rigorous lifestyle of being a Methodist had killed him.

So what was all that harsh order about? Did the Oxford crew just do all of that just for fun? Why didn't they just go to church on Sundays like everyone else? Well, you see, they were making their best attempts at *holy living*. They were striving for both inward and outward purity. John felt one should be able to sense God's forgiveness. However, this feeling does not necessarily mean that sin cannot creep back into a believer's life. Thus, it was important to participate in self-examination and what he called works of piety and works of mercy. Works of piety include prayer, taking communion, and worshipping with others. Works of mercy are things like helping the poor or visiting those in prison. It is clear then that the first Methodist's knew finding time for such works would not be possible without a well thought out, disciplined, method for living.

When learning about Wesley it is extremely important to point out that Wesley did not believe that these works brought you salvation. He felt adamant about, and had to defend time and time again the fact that he believed forgiveness is purely a gift from God. Wesley also held that because Christ died for all and not just for an elect few, which was a common thought in Wesley's day, that we must choose to respond in *faith* and *accept* God's gift.

Further, he even believed that our ability to even have this faith is also a gift. From his sermon entitled *Salvation by Faith*, "Of yourselves cometh neither your faith nor your salvation. It is the gift of God, the free, undeserved gift—the faith through which we are saved." Works of piety and mercy allow us then to respond

to this gift *by loving God and loving our neighbor*, another axiom very important to Wesley. Likewise, Wesley also believed that because in his words “God worketh in you therefore you must work: you must be workers together with God.” As we know being a Christian isn’t an easy path, we must, as the Gospel tells us, “deny ourselves.”

Lastly, it isn’t just Wesley and the first Methodist’s that felt discipline would help us along our journey. The author of the verses from Proverbs that Gary/Chuck read for us paints a picture of God watching us as we stumble around in the dark, lost. Without obedience we end up at a dead end. No place to turn. Further, the author of Peter tells new followers that if they get lazy it will be easy to fall back into the evil that used to consume them. New and longtime Christians alike need to remember that temptation is always looming. Instead, the text tells us to let our lives be shaped by God’s hands. It clearly tells us that just as the early Methodists did, we should strive for *holy living*.

So what does all of this talk of discipline mean for us today? It means when was the last time you sat down and really thought about how you used your time. We know that there are certain things that we must do in each day. We must sleep, we must eat, and we must make sure that, if we have them, our children do likewise. But I have a hunch that if we really thought about it, if we really kept track, there are times during our day that, dare I say it, we don’t use as wisely as we could. Now, I am not saying that you, nor I, aren’t busy. I am not implying that we all sit around and waste large parts of our lives. I am simply encouraging us to be more aware, like the first Methodist were, about the use of our time.

And so we return to my little secret. Just as Wesley believed, I believe, time and forgiveness are gifts from God. I have come to believe that my lack of organization, my lack of discipline, turns into a lack of thankfulness of these gifts. I believe that I would have more time for works of piety and works of mercy, if I organized my life. If like Wesley and the Oxford boys I had a method, a routine, a well thought out schedule, I believe I would have more opportunities to love God and love my neighbor. Just like keeping my life on track doesn’t come naturally for me, living a life worthy of God’s call takes time, energy, and a little organization.

We are five weeks into Lent. Lent is the time during the Christian calendar that we are called to self-examination. We are called to evaluate ways we can better respond to God’s love. As such, I am inviting you to join me on a journey to a more disciplined life. On your way out I have provided a Devotional packet to help you. In it you will find words of wisdom from Wesley himself, you will find scriptures for inspiration, calming meditations, and you will find what I call a Time Log. For the next few weeks I am going to be monitoring my time. At night before I go sleep I am going to record how I spent my day. I invite you to do the same. My hope is that this tool will allow us to carve out an extra ten minutes for prayer, an additional thirty minutes for silence, and maybe, just maybe, it might help to carve out a few ours to serve our brothers and sisters in need.

I think it is safe to say that I would not have made it as one of the Oxford Boys. But we know that being a Methodist isn't *just* about methods. Being a Methodist is about being a follower of Christ, it's about being someone who does all within their power to be thankful for God's amazing love. And likewise to do all that is within us to respond by loving all of God's people. After having studied Wesley and the first Methodist's it is my firm belief that more methods in life will do just that. Will you, as Wesley said, work together with God? Why wait? Pick up your packet as you leave. Start finding ways to love God and your neighbor more fully today.

Please remain seated and join in a Hymn of Reflection that asks you to Come and Find the Quiet Center. Come and find a place where there is room for a heart to care, where there is always room to spare.

#### Pastoral Prayer

Creator God, you are holy. Help us to live a life more worthy of your holy presence. God we feel ragged, tired, worn out. Give us the strength to love you more. We feel pressured for time. We feel we don't have any left to give. Give us the courage to love our neighbors they way you called us to.

God sometimes your presence around us is all we have. Be with those that don't feel you this day. Be with those that are failing, grieving, and in pain. Be with those that are hungry and need a place to lay their head.

Help us in the coming weeks to find a quiet place to feel your love. Help us take time to be holy. Help us to pray as your Son taught us to pray...Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be they name, your kingdom come, your will be done as it is in heaven, give us this day