

**A Crisis of Faith**  
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**Lenten Message**  
**Dakotas Conference Director of Ministries**

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Greetings in the name of Christ! I'm Pastor Rebecca Trefz, the Director of Ministries for the Dakotas Conference. This week, we are continuing our journey through Lent and looking at the life and faith of John Wesley.

Over the past two weeks, we've heard about Wesley's early life—his childhood as a pastor's kid; that pivotal moment of being saved from a burning home like a "brand plucked from the fire"; his days of starting a revival movement with some fellow college students; and his quest for holiness—to do everything in his life for the glory of God.

But as we know is often the case, life can bring some unexpected twists and turns. That is the topic of our chapter this week—A Crisis of Faith. For Wesley, as for many people of faith, this wrestling started internally. Despite his faithful spiritual practices and effective ministry—despite probably appearing—on the outside—like he had it all together when it came to his walk of faith, Wesley found himself struggling.

As Rev. Hamilton writes, "In Wesley's head he knew salvation was purely a gift, but often in his heart he seemed to be seeking to win God's acceptance." It's as if he thought, if I could just do a little more...or BE a little more...then I would know I'm saved...know I'm loved...know that I'm doing what God wants.

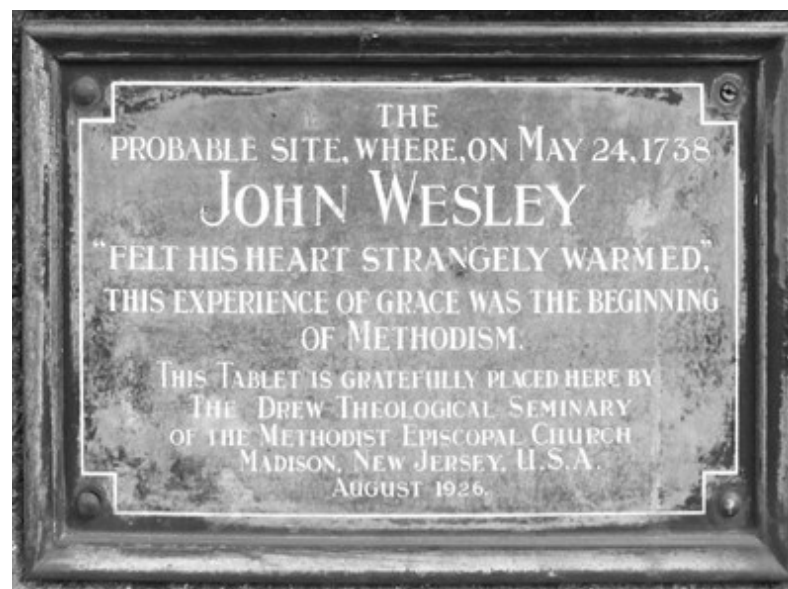
In a culture where we are bombarded with messages and expectations that often lead US to believe we're not ENOUGH, I think we can resonate with Wesley. What Wesley tried to remedy with stricter spiritual practices for himself and his followers, we often try to remedy with longer to-do lists, lives packed with activities and accomplishments, and a quest to live up to what we think people in our churches or families or workplaces expect of us.

But despite our efforts, we can end up feeling, like Wesley, as if we—and our lives—don't measure up.

During these times of restlessness, we—like Wesley—often make choices that we think will be the answer or will settle our spirits. We think, "maybe if I could just make a change—change appointments or jobs or relationships—that would "fix" it—that would make everything will be better—that would make me feel at peace."

I have to wonder if that is what Wesley was trying to do when he "took a new appointment", if you will, to America—to Georgia more specifically. As much as this might have been a calling, Wesley also wrote in one of his journals that his chief aim for "making this move" was to save his own soul.

Of course, if you know the history of Wesley, you know it didn't necessarily work out the way HE had planned. From his shaken faith during the stormy boat ride across the Atlantic, to his unsuccessful mission to the Native Americans, to his embarrassing behavior when dealing with a failed romantic relationship, this change didn't prove to be the solution to Wesley's struggle—another reminder of how his story mirrors many of ours.



When we're growing up or when we answer the call to follow Jesus, we often have a vision of what life will look like. It's not that we expect it to be easy but, if we're seeking to obey God's will, shouldn't it just "all work out"—or at least, shouldn't always feel at peace about it?

In reality, it's not always that simple. Despite our "plans", the unexpected happens in life. We lose a loved one. We face a devastating illness. We get a pink slip or divorce papers. Or we get appointed to a church—or receive a pastor—that, at best, doesn't seem like a good fit and, at worst, seems like a punishment from God.

In each of these cases—or in any storm or valley in life—it's easy to ask, where is God in all of this? And it's easy to think well, God isn't in the tough stuff or the discomfort so if I can just change my situation or myself then I'll experience God—and God's "blessings"—again.

And yet, I believe our faith—our Easter faith—challenges us to see things differently. In a few weeks we'll be reminded of the reality of our faith—that Good Fridays happen, just like storms and difficult appointments and tough relationships happen.



But these challenges are not the end of the story. We serve a God of redemption—a God who doesn't work IN SPITE OF the hard times, but who works THROUGH the hard times as well—who doesn't work on our behalf because WE are enough, but because God is enough.

Romans 8:28 reminds us, "that in ALL things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." As followers of

Jesus, this is a promise that we cling to—not because we always FEEL like it's true—but because we have FAITH that is—faith that comes from not just believing IN God, but also BELIEVING God.

John Wesley's trust in God was resurrected during a small group meeting on Aldersgate Street when he felt his heart "strangely warmed." But it was a heart that had been molded and shaped through times of doubt and fear and frustration. It was a heart that was humbled and opened to receiving ALL that God wanted to teach and offer. And it was a heart that was then prepared to burn brightly so others might know the saving power and love of Jesus Christ.

So my prayer for each of us this Lenten season and beyond is that when we face a storm or a valley or a crisis of faith, that we would not turn away or give up hope or forget the love Jesus has for us.

But instead, may we seek to see each chapter in our life, each setting of our ministry, each person or relationship—good or bad—as something God can—and WILL—use to mold and shape us...to teach us something about God or about ourselves...and to prepare us for the road ahead. Will you pray with me?

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***God of all things, we humbly bow before you now and we confess that we struggle in our walk with you. Even though we know salvation is a gift and that your love is ever present, it often seems like we should be able to FEEL it and SEE it. And sometimes we don't.***

***So Lord, in those times, place in our ears and our hearts the words of Lamentations—that "Because of the your great love we are not consumed, for your compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."***

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