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Tyson's "Praying with the Wesleys: Foundations of methodist spirituality" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Tyson, J. R. (2019). *Praying with the Wesleys: Foundations of methodist spirituality*. Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church. 196 pp. \$18.99. ISBN 9781945935541

Praying with the Wesleys consists of nine chapters of 82 pages about the history of John and Charles Wesley and five appendixes of 114 pages of selected prayers by John Wesley and his mother Susanna, and selected text from Charles Wesley's more than 9000 hymns.

John R. Tyson, PhD, is Professor of Church History/Director of United Methodist Church Studies at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School in Rochester, New York. There are, apparently, a lot of Methodists who yearn for the spiritual power that was evident in the early years of the Methodist movement. Tyson's view is that it was grounded in prayer, and a lot of it. "Would," he says, "that we could drink deeply of the spirit." John Wesley left evidence that he rose at 4:00am, divided his day into 15-minute segments of prayer, reflection, and personal accountability, based on family teaching he received at the feet of his mother, Susannah Annesley. Her father, Dr. Samuel Annesley, was a church leader and theologian among the Puritans, and her husband Samuel's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all Puritan pastors and leaders. But both Susannah and Samuel left their Puritan upbringings to embrace the Church of England, so their sons John and Charles both imbibed and developed Anglican worship practices and prayer life and the Puritan inward life of spiritual disciplines observable in their extended family.

The inner life of a Methodist would be permeated with prayer, literally "praying without ceasing," structuring his or her life to do the will of God, keeping his commandments, and doing good to all people, even neighbors and strangers. An emphasis on justification by faith, a faith that you could feel, living a faith of a son rather than that of a servant, moved John and Charles away from trying to earn God's approval, an emphasis they picked up from Moravians. Thus, they lived and taught and sought spiritual disciplines like the study of Scripture, the Lord's Supper, close spiritual fellowship, fasting, works of piety and mercy, and of course, prayer. And prayer is not just going to God with a laundry list of requests, but a window through which we can experience God and His grace, and the path through which we can experience God's acceptance, forgiveness, kindness, joy, and love for ourselves.

Looking into our past is always a good way to remind ourselves of where we came from and how our ancestors viewed their faith walks and priorities. If the thee's and thou's and thine's and other peculiar prayer expressions of an earlier era set your teeth on edge, this book may be a challenge. Still, the book is written in a straightforward manner appropriate for Christian college and university libraries, especially helpful for Methodist, Nazarene, and other Arminian denominations, but also useful for an in-depth solid look at the development of Wesleyan origins and the people who started this Protestant movement.

Reviewer

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