

**Cloud of Witnesses**



**John  
Wesley**



# Cloud of Witnesses: John Wesley

## Main Idea

**Faith happens best when we encourage one another in community.**

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## BIBLE CONNECTIONS

### 1 Thessalonians 5:10-24

Jesus died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with him. So continue encouraging each other and building each other up, just like you are doing already. Brothers and sisters, we ask you to respect those who are working with you, leading you, and instructing you. Think of them highly with love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are disorderly. Comfort the discouraged. Help the weak. Be patient with everyone. Make sure no one repays a wrong with a wrong, but always pursue the good for each other and everyone else. Rejoice always. Pray continually. Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Don't suppress the Spirit. Don't brush off Spirit-inspired messages, but examine everything carefully and hang on to what is good. Avoid every kind of evil. Now, may the God of peace himself cause you to be completely dedicated to him; and may your spirit, soul, and body be kept intact and blameless at our Lord Jesus Christ's coming. The one who is calling you is faithful and will do this.

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## BACKGROUND FOR LEADERS

Hebrews 11 tells the stories of people of faith throughout the Bible, offering encouragement to the original audience that they can step forward in faith surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. In the creeds of the church, we profess belief in the "communion of saints." These are both ways of saying how important our foremothers and forefathers of faith are to our own relationships with God. Their stories offer wisdom for living, inspiration and encouragement, and a sense of spiritual companionship.

John Wesley developed an international faith movement in a time when tensions between the American Colonies and England were increasing. John was sent to the colonies by a group called the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, which emphasized the habits of holiness. However, one of the most important encounters in John Wesley's spiritual formation came in an unexpected place. While on the voyage to the American continent, the ship John was traveling on came into a terrible storm. He was terrified, but saw that some fellow passengers, members of a religious group called the Moravians, were calm and encouraging, strongly rooted in their faith. He remembered this group when he struggled with his ministry, and it was through continued conversation and worship with the Moravians back in England that John experienced God's love and grace. In the colonies, John served congregations as an itinerant preacher, traveling from place to place to lead worship, preach, and celebrate the sacraments. This was tiring work and travel. As a result, Wesley encouraged lay leadership and small groups in local communities. These models were started due to the practical needs of a pastor stretched thin, but the smaller groups and more personal leadership ended up providing a flourishing framework for faith and community formation.

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## GATHERING ACTIVITY

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### *Human Knot*

Have the learners stand in a circle, facing inward. Tell the learners to reach their right arms toward the center and grab someone else's hand. Make sure they don't grab the hand of the person on either side of them. Next, have the learners reach their left arms in and grab someone else's hand. Let the learners work together to untangle themselves without letting go of any hands.

After the activity, **ask:** Was that hard or easy? Why? How did it feel when you finished?

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## STORY CONNECTION

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**Say:** Today we're going to hear about John Wesley, a pastor who is the founder of the Methodist Churches. When John was a new young minister, he went on a voyage from England to the American colonies (now the United States) to serve a church there. When he started working, things didn't go so well. John loved God, but he thought that he had to keep a strict set of rules to live out his faith. The church didn't like this very much, and after struggling and feeling defeated, John went home to England. He was struggling with his faith. One day at church, John's "heart was strangely warmed" as he realized that his relationship with God was rooted in God's love and grace. This experience gave John the courage he needed to go back to North

TIP: Telling the story in a calm, smooth voice will draw the children into the story.

America. This time, he pastored people with attention to their relationships to God and one another, more than what rules and habits they kept. People grew in faith and relationships with one another, and the churches grew. First Thessalonians, a letter in the New Testament, says “continue encouraging each other and building each other up.” That is just what John and the Methodists did, and we can too!

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## PRACTICE AND REFLECTION

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### *Questions for Discussion*

**Ask:** Are there any rules that you have a hard time following? Are there rules about faith or church that are hard to follow? Why do you think we have them?

**Ask:** Do you have any friends or family members who encourage your faith? How do they do that?

### *Prayer of Blessing*

**Pray:** God, thank you for your witness John Wesley and his courage to minister. May we follow his example to encourage one another and grow together in our love of Jesus. Amen.

### *A Cord of Three Strands*

For this activity, you will need multicolored embroidery thread or yarn, about two feet per learner. An adaptation for young learners: Bring some braided bracelets already made, and help young learners put three beads onto their bracelets.

**Say:** One of the things that John Wesley encouraged in his ministry were small group meetings called “Classes.” The classes weren’t like classes you take in school. They were groups of neighbors and friends who met together to encourage one another in faith, praying and studying the Bible together. John understood the verse in Ecclesiastes that says, “one can be overpowered, but two together can put up resistance. A three-ply cord doesn’t easily snap.” We are going to make a bracelet out of three cords that will remind us that God brings us into community to make us stronger.

Instructions for braided bracelets:

1. Cut three equal lengths of string. Gather the ends and tie a knot two inches from one end.
2. Tape the short end of the strings down on a flat surface.
3. Take the far right string in your right thumb and index finger, and the far left string in your left thumb and index finger.

### Supplies:

- Multicolored embroidery thread or yarn
- Scissors
- Tape

4. Cross the far right string over the middle. It is now the middle string. Cross the left string over the middle. It is now the middle string.
5. Repeat step four until the braid is the desired length for a bracelet.

### Hymn

“Christ the Lord Is Risen Today” (*The United Methodist Hymnal* #302)

**Say:** One of John’s good friends and coworkers was his brother, Charles. Charles was also a minister, and wrote beautiful hymns. This song is one that he wrote.

*Send home the “Reflecting at Home” sheet on page 5 with each child. This will help engage the whole family in this spiritual practice together.*

### Supplies:

- Hymnbooks containing the song, “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today”

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**REFLECTING AT HOME**

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Today your child learned about John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement. One of the hallmarks of Wesley's work was his system of dividing faith communities into small classes that would encourage one another in faith, prayer, and studying the Bible together. Do you, your family, and your child have particular friends or communities that offer this kind of support and encouragement? Take a moment in conversation with your child to name and honor those friendships, and include this attitude of sacred relationship next time you gather in your community or have that friend over to play.

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**FURTHER READING**

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Check out Daniel 3 to read the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three friends who stuck together and encouraged one another in faith when things got tough.