

# Enthusiast.life

## Finding a Faith that Fills

DAY 1  
excerpted from the book – do not distribute

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Introduction .....”What is an Enthusiast?”  
(And How They Turn Trials into Triumphs)  
By Bob Whitesel D.Min., Ph.D.

(to be secured)

Foreword .....“The Greatest World-changer Since The Apostle Paul”  
by Elmer Towns Ph.D.,  
co-founder of Liberty University,  
dean/founder of Liberty Theological Seminary.

(to be secured)

Preface ..... “Why Everyone Should Study the Men Behind Methodism”  
by Len Sweet Ph.D.,  
Best-selling author of “The Well Played Life”  
Professor of Evangelism at Drew Theological School

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*Week 1, day 2, page # .....God sometimes takes us into environments  
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*Week 1, day 3, page # .....An enthusiast must have a group that creates  
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*Week 1, day 3, page # ..... An enthusiast must be willing to open up with  
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*Week 1, day 4, page # .....Following Christ requires going out and becoming  
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to focus mainly on your needs and the  
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*Week 1, day 5, page # ..... Fasting is an experience of self- denial and  
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*Week 1, day 5, page # ..... Fasting reminds us of the pain Jesus endured on  
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*Week 2, day 1, page # .....Early successes can propel one to think too much  
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sensitive heart does not temper them.*

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servant to empowered son or daughter.*

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*Week 3, day 2, page # .....The eternal future of human souls is so important  
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*Week 3, day 3, page # .....Are you ready to receive ridicule and even  
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*Week 5, day 2, page # .....The songs of the Wesleyan movement not only  
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*Week 5, day 2, page # ..... Fruits of the Spirit, not emotion alone, are a sign  
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*Week 5, day 2, page # .....Worship should underscore the message.*

*Week 5, day 2, page # .....You don't need to be talented to sing along.*

*Week 5, day 2, page # .....It helps if people already know the melody.*

*Week 5, day 2, page # .....Worship allows you to testify of a shared  
spiritual experience.*

*Week 5, day 2, page # ..... Guard against worship distractions.*

*Week 5, day 3, page # ..... Because all wealth belongs to God, Christians should seek the Owner's guidance in using it.*

*Week 5, day 3, page # ..... Christians should be industrious in earning money, if they intend to honor God with it.*

*Week 5, day 3, page # ..... Christians should be frugal and use their money wisely.*

*Week 5, day 3, page # ..... Giving generously can do a world of good.*

*Week 5, day 3, page # ..... Do not allow God's provision to separate you or distinguish you as above others.*

*Week 5, day 4, page # ..... The secret to energy and endurance can be a daily schedule.*

*Week 5, day 4, page # ..... Maximize your daily opportunities to share the Good News, while guarding your communion with God and your health.*

*Week 5, day 5, page # ..... Exhibit authentic, enthusiastic and Biblical Christianity.*

*Week 5, day 5, page # ..... Exhibit the Faith of a Son/Daughter.*

*Week 5, day 5, page # ..... Exhibit a Heavenly Assurance.*

*Week 6, day 1, page # ..... Begin by examining a controversial topic through a Biblical lens.*

Week 6, day 1, page # ..... *Love of money, and not the love of God, is behind many heinous sins.*

Week 6, day 1, page # ..... *Abused and molested people are every Christian's brothers and sisters.*

Week 6, day 1, page # ..... *Take your message to where those who need it assemble.*

Week 6, day 1, page # ..... *Do all in your power to check a growing evil.*

Week 6, day 2, page # ..... *Salvation is our main message.*

Week 6, day 2, page # ..... *Small groups create discipleship.*

Week 6, day 2, page # ..... *Serving others honors God's love and builds bridges across which the Good News can travel.*

Week 6, day 3, page # ..... *There are doctrines of more "essential nature" on which Christians can and must agree.*

Week 6, day 3, page # ..... *Quarrels over "doctrines of less essential nature" can hamper the spread of the Good News.*

Week 6, day 4, page # ..... *"Do all the good you can."*

Week 6, day 4, page # ..... *"By all the means you can."*

Week 6, day 4, page # ..... *"In all the ways you can."*

*Week 6, day 4, page #..... "In all the places you can."*

*Week 6, day 4, page # ..... "At all the times you can."*

*Week 6, day 4, page # ..... "To all the people you can."*

*Week 6, day 4, page # ..... "As long as you've ever can."*

*Week 6, day 5, page # ..... Enthusiasts remain energetically engaged in sharing the Good News through teaching, writing and serving others up until the end.*

*Week 6, day 5, page #..... Enthusiasts have a deepening, personal relationship with Jesus Christ at the center of their lives, work and faith.*

This book is dedicated:

To the Wesley scholars who have gone before me, delving into the smallest details of the lives of the remarkable men and women whose enthusiasm continues to impact a world in need.

To my co-Fellows of the Billy Graham Center for Evangelism at Wheaton College, my academic friends at Fuller Theological Seminary, Talbot School of Theology and my colleagues in the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education, The Academy for Intercultural Church Research, The Society for Church Consulting and The Great Commission Research Network.

To my colleagues at Wesley Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University for their support, friendship, team spirit and enthusiasm as we create tomorrow's seminary.

And to my family for the love and enthusiasm we share with one another and for Christ.

(All Biblical citations are from the Common English Bible (CEB) unless noted.)

**Foreword**  
**By Dr. Elmer Towns**

*“The Greatest World-changer Since the Apostle Paul”*

John Wesley was the most influential Christian leader since the Apostle Paul because he carried out the Great Commission in its entirety. When Wesley died, there were 243 Methodist churches in the United States. By the War of 1812, there were 5000 Methodist churches. Wesley not only preached the gospel to lost people, he raised up an army of circuit riding preachers, each one of them planting up to 50 - 100 churches. Within one generation after the death of John Wesley, his movement, the Methodist Church - became the largest protestant movement in the world.

Elmer L. Towns, Nov. 3, 2014 (letter to the author)  
Co-founder and Vice President, Liberty University  
Dean of The Liberty University School of Theology

**Week 1: God Has A Plan for Your Life**  
(Abraham & Isaac, *Genesis 22*)

Week 1, Day 1 ..... Sacrificing Your Future Upon God's Altar (Epworth, UK)

Nothing may be quite as heart-wrenching as the death of a child. Though this has never happened to Rebecca and me, I imagine the worst case would be watching it happen before my eyes. John Wesley, who would be called an "enthusiast" as well as "the most influential Christian leader since the Apostle Paul," almost didn't make it to adulthood.

Understanding the biblical story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac provides a background (*Genesis 22:1-14*). You may recall Michelangelo's famous painting which depicted not only Isaac's bewilderment but also Abraham's faith amid heartbreak. Soon an angel and a replacement animal appeared. This event fostered faith and trust in both son and parent. Commenting on these verses years later, John Wesley would write, "the more eminent the danger is ... the more wonderful and the more welcome is the deliverance... The best evidence of our fearing God is our being willing to honour him with that which is dearest to us, and to part with all to him, or for him."

Similar was the story of a young five-year-old John, whose parents called Jacky. On a winter's day in 1709, the two-story parsonage of Rev. Samuel and Susanna Wesley was engulfed in flames. Siblings and parents had all escaped including one-year-old Charles. As mother, father and townspeople looked on, Jacky appeared in the second-floor window, flames leaping behind him.

The two-story brick parsonage was rebuilt by Samuel Wesley and today stands on the edge of Epworth, England, a small farming community in the rolling hills of England. With wood floors and walls, an accidental fire unleashed an inferno that prevented anyone from reentering that fateful day. As the burning floors began to collapse, the five-year-old's small head peered over the second-floor windowsill, most likely into the desperate eyes of his mother. No ladder no means of reentering were available. I've been at that rebuilt window. By estimating a five-year-old's height, Jacky would have been visible only from his eyes upward. It must have been a dreadful experience for a mother to look into the eyes of one of her youngest children, helplessly trapped in a burning inferno with certain death awaiting. Having read Susanna's letters about her robust prayer life, I can only

imagine the fervency of the prayer this godly mother sent heavenward.

A story is told that a man from the crowd ran forward and threw himself against the brick wall of the burning parsonage. He commanded another townsman to scamper up his shoulders. I've stood beneath that window and knowing the average height of that day, it would've meant only by straining could the men reach an outstretched arm of young Jacky. But reach Jacky they did, snatching him from the flames, seconds before the fire engulfed the room.

After reading Susanna's original letters, it is clear this image was seared in her mind and heart. As Abraham was ready to sacrifice his whole future before God provided a rescue, once again salvation leapt forth from an unlikely source: two unnamed villagers whose identities have been lost to time.

As I study Susanna's life I see that this event had two remarkable impacts upon her.

*Lesson 1:*

*Susanna realized like Abraham, God sometimes allows terrible experiences to create a memory and a lesson.*

Susanna realized God had something special for Jacky because of the experience God had put them through. One lesson for Susanna was that God had a special purpose for Jacky. Though always a devoted mother who allotted time each day for each child, Susanna now chose to spend extra time each day with Jacky in lessons and Bible reading.

Little did Susanna realize that Jacky would grow into one of the great intellectuals of his age. But God knew, and through a harrowing experience Susanna would begin to impart in John the insights that would nurture a world-changer.

*Lesson 2:*

*Susanna learned to give the future of her family to God because even when things look hopeless God can help in the most remarkable ways.*

Just as the ram suddenly appeared as a substitute for Isaac, so too rescue for young Jacky came from two men whose names have faded into history. Where might history have been if those two men had not taken the initiative? It is a reminder today that God often uses the common and mundane to make world-changing impact.

### *Application of the Lessons*

*For personal devotion*, read the questions, meditate upon each and write down your responses. *For group discussion*, share as appropriate your answers with your group and then discuss the application.

*(Lesson 1)* Ask yourself, have there been trying times in your past or even that you're going through today, in which you wonder why God would afflict you with such calamity? It could be because God has a rescue planned and a story that will emerge which will guide the rest of your life. Give God your dreams, fears, plans and future. Seek His story for your life.

*(Lesson 2)* Ask yourself, have you overlooked how God uses common and unremarkable people to do great things? Perhaps you feel average, normal... nothing extraordinary ... the furthest thing from an enthusiast. But that doesn't mean God can't change the world through you. He can! But it may not be a moment that people remember or even recognize. Sharing Jesus with a neighbor or even a casual passerby can change their life and the future of many. Don't live your life based on what others see as the fruit of your labor. Your heavenly Father sees your impact, if you are faithful.

Yesterday we saw that God can pluck someone from the clutches of death for a greater purpose. Today's story continues that theme. Abraham was commanded by God to take his "only son, who you love" to the land of Moriah and to sacrifice him "on one of the mountains" that God would show him (Genesis 22:2).

Dutifully, if not hesitantly, Abraham set out for the mountain that most likely became Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

God provided a substitute ram for the sacrifice and his angel proclaimed, "I now know that you revere God and didn't hold back your son, your only son, from me" (Genesis 22:12). A life-lesson from Abraham is that God may ask us to place our dreams and hopes at his feet and be ready to walk away. This same lesson was learned by John Wesley's younger brother Charles, when he first arrived at the college of Christ Church in Oxford, England.

Have you ever visited or read about a place that is marvelously different from the place you live? Perhaps reading a book such as "The Chronicles of Narnia" or watching a historical movie has taken you to a world so different from your normal life that it captures your imagination. Oxford, England is one such wonderfully unusual place. An 800-year-old jumble of spires and towers lines the small winding streets. Poet Matthew Arnold described it as "the city of dreaming spires."<sup>1</sup> Professors and students in colorful regalia on their way to classes and the chatter of different languages remind you that you are at the center of Western education. It was similar in Charles' day and therefore was very different from the rolling farmland of his upbringing. Mount Moriah was a similarly unfamiliar, yet beautiful place ... much more mountainous, rocky and commanding than the rolling, desert environment of Beersheba from where Abraham had come.

When we go to such new locations we are often tempted to think that God doesn't necessarily follow. Sometimes we're tempted to leave behind our old self and reinvent ourselves as someone new. Sometimes when people transfer to a new job, move to a new neighborhood or go off to school they are tempted to reinvent themselves as somebody different, perhaps even less religious.

Charles and John had the same temptation when they arrived at Oxford. For all its energy, knowledge and beauty it was also home to one of England's most prestigious seminaries, the College, Christ Church. Its prominent dining hall with

soaring ceilings showcases dozens of larger-than-life size pictures of graduates including: Lewis Carroll, John Locke, William Penn, King Edward VII and others.

Yet for all its adoration of education, Christ Church was largely filled with students and faculty who were irreligious, or at best deists who did not embrace the Bible as a source of truth. Charles was so frustrated that to his brother he complained that, “(at Oxford) a man stands a very fair chance of being laughed out of his religion.”<sup>2</sup>

This was a sobering critique. Yet John had already endured and graduated from Christ Church. He knew that if Charles would not give in to social pressures of friends or professors it would instill a persistence to follow God even when the faith journey seemed difficult.

And stay Charles did, eventually graduating like John. In the process, they created a spiritual “method” to remain strong amid an academic and social community that regarded their faith as laughable.

*Lesson 1:*

*God sometimes takes us into environments  
where discarding our faith may be easier than maintaining it.*

Abraham probably thought, “How can I sacrifice my son, for whom I waited and prayed for so long?” And Charles probably thought, “How can I sacrifice my relationship with Christ, by staying in an environment where they laugh at me for my beliefs?” Perhaps you have encountered a job, a neighborhood or a group of friends that ridiculed or undermined your faith. In both stories, we see that such adversity may be allowed by God to make us choose faith over situation.

*Lesson 2:*

*Out of persecution can come innovation.*

In the following days, we will witness the Wesleys put together a method for staying spiritually strong amid persecution and ridicule. God may permit faith challenges to not only make us stronger but also to make us spiritually inventive.

Tomorrow you will see how out of this persecution John and Charles designed a method for staying spiritually strong in the midst of mockery. Many churches today unknowingly honor their innovative “method” in the name “Methodist.” But few know this method emerged out of their persecution at Oxford. As you journey with me through this devotional, you will uncover a method that has changed

more lives than any movement since the Apostle Paul. Keep in mind that it was a method born out of persecution and ridicule ... and so too may be your life lessons.

### *Application of the Lessons*

*For personal devotion*, read the questions, meditate upon each and write down your responses. *For group discussion*, share as appropriate your answers with your group and then discuss the application.

*(Lesson 1)* Think of times when God took you through difficult times. How do you typically respond? Do you just go along with the changes? Or do you stick to your beliefs and grudgingly trudge forward regardless of the obstacles? What part does faith play in this? Did you need more faith? Read this verse to foster more faith:

Those who stand firm during testing are blessed. They are tried and true. They will receive the life God has promised to those who love him as their reward.

Those who stand firm during testing are blessed. They are tried and true. They will receive the life God has promised to those who love him as their reward (*James 1:12*).

*(Lesson 2)* Take from this story the lesson that ridicule and persecution does not need to drive you away from your faith, but rather can help you foster creative new ways to express it. Recall a time when you felt persecuted for your beliefs. Now write out an innovate and alternative way to share your faith if it occurs again.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold, "Thyrsis" in *Macmillian's Magazine* (London, 1866).

<sup>2</sup> Frank Baker, *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., vol. 25, *Letters* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), p. 235