

The Music of the Heart

Music, especially singing, is an integral part of who I am; it has been all my life. Growing up in a churchgoing family, I heard and sang hymns from infancy. My life in the church also gave me a love of the Bible and theology. God's call to ministry was therefore not unexpected—at least not to the people of my home church. Myself, I was indeed surprised, having entered college intending to become an English teacher because of my love of language and poetry.

Love of hymns, love of Scripture, love of theology, and love of poetry are four parts of an equation that equals not only Curtis Hurley but *Charles Wesley*. His hymn texts are Scriptural allusion, doctrinal catechesis, exquisite poetry, and spiritual devotion, all in one. Set to the music of equally talented and godly composers, Wesley's hymns will be sung by the church to eternity. Saints in the Church Triumphant are singing them now.

Fairview Church is in the process of applying for a grant from the Eli Lilly Foundation enabling me to reflect upon the life and writings of Charles Wesley for an extended period of time in England and Georgia in the summer of 2011. It will be not so much an educational or historic exercise as an inwardly personal one, like a genealogical quest for ancestors one has never met, or the quest of an adopted child for a biological parent. I want to roam the house and yard where Charles grew up; sit in pews he sat in with his mother, brothers, and sisters; absorb the atmosphere of his college. More than to visit places, though, I want to "live with" Charles Wesley. Being in England will help, of course, but my hope is that I might pursue that search with single-minded focus and—one hopes—spiritual fervor.

I am by no means a "student" of Charles Wesley. I regard myself as his companion, a traveler on the same road. And, like Wesley, I am a Methodist—not only in the sense that I belong to a Methodist denomination, but that I am a disciple of John and Charles Wesley's theology and emphasis on practical Christianity. I must confess that I am, alas, a *poor* disciple. To be the leader you expect me to be—and I expect myself to be—I long to be filled with more of the Wesleyan fire. My love for Charles's hymns is, I believe, a providentially galvanizing way for me to approach and accomplish it.

Part of my vision for Fairview Church is to follow the Wesley brothers' model of gathering ourselves into small groups for mutual support and accountability. My goal for the next year and a half is that we will form and solidly establish at least two such groups. A grant from the Lilly Foundation can help us move in that direction.

My spending time with family in England and Georgia may seem to be peripheral to furthering and building upon this goal. To the contrary, I believe it will be energizing, focusing, and creatively inspiring, not only for me but also for you as you undergo activities planned to take place during my absence. We will all benefit as together we live more intentionally toward Scriptural holiness.