The following account of Wesley’s conversion on May 24, 1738, comes from his own pen, in a document entitled “Mr. Wesley’s Conversion, Nettleton Court, off Aldersgate Street”. Key passages are underlined for emphasis.

What occurred on Wednesday, the 24th, I think best to relate at large, after premising what may make it the better understood. Let him that cannot receive it ask the Father of lights that he would give more light to him and me.

1. I believe, till I was about ten years old, I had not sinned away that “washing of the Holy Ghost” which was given me in baptism, having been strictly educated, and carefully taught that I could only be saved “by universal obedience, by keeping all the commandments of God.” in the of which I was diligently instructed. And those instructions, so far as they respected outward duties and sins, I gladly received and often thought of. But all that was said to me of inward obedience or holiness I neither understood nor remembered. So that I was, indeed, as ignorant of the true meaning of the law as I was of the gospel of Christ.

2. The next six or seven years were spent at school; where, outward restraints being removed, I was much more negligent than before, even of outward duties, and almost continually guilty of outward sins, which I knew to be such, though they were not scandalous in the eye of the world. However, I still read the Scriptures, and said my prayers, morning and evening. And what I now hoped to be saved by was,

1. Not being so bad as other people. 2. Having still a kindness for religion. And, 3. Reading the Bible, going to church, and saying my prayers.

3. Being removed to the university, for five years, I still said my prayers, both in public and private, and read, with the Scriptures, several other books of religion, especially comments on the New Testament. Yet I had not all this while so much as a notion of inward holiness; nay, went on habitually and, for the most part, very contentedly, in some or other known sin; indeed, with some intermission and short struggles, especially before and after the holy
communion, which I was obliged to receive thrice a year. I cannot
well tell what I hoped to be saved by now, when I was continually
sinning against that little light I had, unless by those transient fits of
what many divines taught me to call “repentance.”

4. When I was about twenty-two, my father pressed me to enter into
holy orders. At the same time the providence of God directing me to
Kempis’s “Christian Pattern,” I began to see that true religion was
seated in the heart, and that God’s law extended to all our thoughts,
as well as words and actions. I was, however, very angry at Kempis
for being too strict, though I read him only in Dean Stanhope’s
translation. Yet I had frequently much sensible comfort in reading
him, such as I was an utter stranger to before; and meeting likewise
with a religious friend, which I never had until now, I began to alter
the whole form of my conversation, and to set in earnest upon a new
life. I set apart an hour or two a day for religious retirement. I
communicated every week. I watched against all sin, whether in word
or deed. I began to aim at, and pray for, inward holiness. So that now,
“doing so much, and living so good a life,” I doubted not but I was a
good Christian.

5. Removing soon after to another college, I executed a resolution
which I was before convinced was of the utmost importance, shaking
off at once all my trifling acquaintance. I began to see more and more
the value of time. I applied myself closer to study. I watched more
carefully against actual sins. I advised others to be religious,
according to that scheme of religion by which I modeled my own life.
But meeting now with Mr. Law’s “Christian Perfection,” and “Serious
Call,” (although I was much offended at many parts of both, yet) they
convinced me more than ever of the exceeding height, and breadth,
and depth of the law of God. The light flowed in so mightily upon my
soul that every thing appeared in a new view. I cried to God for help,
and resolved not to prolong the time of obeying him as I never had
done before. And by my continued “endeavor to keep his whole law,”
inward and outward, “to the utmost of my power,” I was persuaded
that I should be accepted of him, and that I was even then in a state
of salvation.

6. In 1730 I began visiting the prisons, assisting the poor and sick in
town, and doing what other good I could, by my presence or my little fortune, to the bodies and souls of all men. To this end I abridged myself of all superfluities, and many that are called necessaries of life. I soon became a by-word for so doing, and I rejoiced that “my name was cast out as evil.” The next spring I began observing the Wednesday and Friday fasts, commonly observed in the ancient church, tasting no food till three in the afternoon. And now I knew not how to go any farther. I diligently strove against all sin. I omitted no sort of self-denial which I thought lawful; I carefully used, both in public and in private, all the means of grace at all opportunities. I omitted no occasion of doing good: I for that reason suffered evil. And all this I knew to be nothing, unless as it was directed toward inward holiness. Accordingly this, the image of God, was what I aimed at in all, by doing his will, not my own. Yet when, after continuing some years in this course, I apprehended myself to be near death, I could not find that all this gave me any comfort, or any assurance of acceptance with God. At this I was then not a little surprised, not imagining I had been all this time building on the sand, nor considering that “other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid by God, even Christ Jesus.”

7. Soon after, a contemplative man convinced me, still more than I was convinced before, that outward works are nothing, being alone; and in several conversations instructed me how to pursue inward holiness, or a union of the soul with God. But even of his instructions, (though I then received them as the words of God,) I cannot but now observe,

1. -that he spoke so incautiously [imprudently] against trusting in outward works, that he discouraged me from doing them at all;

2. -that he recommended (as it were, to supply what was wanting in them) mental prayer and the like exercises, as the most effectual means of purifying the soul, and uniting it with God.

Now these were, in truth, as much my own works as visiting the sick or clothing the naked; and the union with God thus pursued was as really my own righteousness as any I had before pursued under another name.
8. In this refined way of trusting to my own works, and my own righteousness, (so zealously inculcated by the mystic writers,) I dragged on heavily, finding no comfort or heal therein till the time of my leaving England. On shipboard, however, I was again active in outward works; where it pleased God, of his free mercy, to give me twenty-six of the Moravian brethren for companions, who endeavored to show me a more excellent way. But I understood it not at first. I was too learned and too wise: so that it seemed foolishness unto me. And I continued preaching and following after and trusting in that righteousness whereby no flesh can be justified.

9. All the time I was at Savannah I was thus beating the air. Being ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, which by a living faith in him bringeth salvation “to every one that believeth,” I sought to establish my own righteousness, and so labored in the fire all my days. I was now properly under the law; I knew that the law of God was spiritual; I consented to it, that it was good. Yea, I delighted in it, after the inner man. Yet was I carnal, sold under sin. Every day was I constrained to cry out, “What I do, I allow not; for what I would, I do not; but what I hate, that I do. To will is ‘indeed’ present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not. For the good which I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. I find a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me; even the law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and still bringing me into captivity to the law of sin.”

10. In this vile, abject state of bondage to sin I was indeed fighting continually, but not conquering. Before, I had willingly served sin; now, it was unwillingly; but still I served it. I fell and rose, and fell again. Sometimes I was overcome, and in heaviness; sometimes I overcame, and was in joy. For as in the former state I had some foretastes of the terrors of the law, so had I in this, of the comforts of the gospel. During this whole struggle between nature and grace (which had now continued above ten years) I had many remarkable returns to prayer, especially when I was in trouble. I had many sensible comforts, which are indeed no other than short anticipations of the life of faith. But I was still under the law, not under grace: the state most who are called Christians are content to live and die in. For I was only striving with, not freed from sin; neither had I the
witness of the Spirit with my spirit, and indeed could not, for I sought it not by faith, but (as it were) by the works of the law.

11. In my return to England, January, 1738, being in imminent danger of death, and very uneasy on that account, I was strongly convinced that the cause of that uneasiness was unbelief, and that the gaining a true, living faith was the one thing needful for me. But still I fixed not this faith on its right object: I meant only faith in God, not faith in or through Christ. Again, I knew not that I was wholly void of this faith; but only thought I had not enough of it. So that when Peter Bohler, whom God prepared for me as soon as I came to London, affirmed of true faith in Christ, (which is but one,) that it had those two fruits inseparably attending it, “dominion over sin, and constant peace from a sense of forgiveness,” I was quite amazed, and looked upon it as a new gospel. If this was so, it was clear I had not faith. But I was not willing to be convinced of this. Therefore I disputed with all my might, and labored to prove that faith might be where these were not; especially where the sense of forgiveness was not: for all the scriptures relating to this, I had been long since taught to construe away, and to call all Presbyterians who spoke otherwise. Besides, I well saw no one could (in the nature of things) have such a sense of forgiveness, and not feel it. But I felt it not. If then there was no faith without this, all my pretensions to faith dropped at once.

12. When I met Peter Bohler again, he consented to put the dispute upon the issue which I desired, viz., Scripture and experience. I first consulted the Scripture. But when I set aside the glosses of men, and simply considered the words of God, comparing them together, endeavoring to illustrate the obscure by the plainer passages, I found they all made against me, and was forced to retreat to my last hold, “that experience would never agree with the literal interpretation of those scriptures. Nor could I, therefore, allow it to be true till I found some living witnesses of it.” He replied, “He could show me such at any time; if I desired it, the next day.” And accordingly the next day he came with three others, all of whom testified of their own personal experience that a true living faith in Christ is inseparable from a sense of pardon for all past, and freedom from all present sins. They added with one mouth, that this faith was the gift, the free gift of God, and that he would surely bestow it upon every soul who earnestly and
perseveringly sought it. I was not thoroughly convinced, and by the grace of God I resolved to seek it unto the end:

1. -by absolutely renouncing all dependence, in whole or in part, upon my own works or righteousness, on which I had really grounded my hope of salvation, though I knew it not, from my youth up;

2. -by adding to the constant use of all the other means of grace continual prayer for this very thing - justifying, saving faith; a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me; a trust in him as my Christ, as my sole justification, sanctification, and redemption.

13. I continued thus to seek it (though with strange indifference, dullness, and coldness, and unusually frequent relapses into sin) till Wednesday, May 24th (1738). I think it was about five this morning that I opened my Testament on those words: “There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature...” (2 Peter 1:4)

Just as I went out, I opened it again on those words: “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” (Mark 12:34)

In the afternoon I was asked to go to St. Paul’s. The anthem was,

“Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice. O let thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint. If thou, Lord, wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it? But there is mercy with thee; therefore thou shalt be feared. O Israel, trust in the Lord: for with the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his sins.” (Psalm 130:1-7)

14. In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away
my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.

15. I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart. But it was not long before the enemy suggested, “This cannot be faith; for where is thy joy?” Then was I taught that peace and victory over sin are essential to faith in the Captain of our salvation; but that, as to the transports of joy that usually attend the beginning of it, especially in those who have mourned deeply, God sometimes giveth, sometimes withholdeth them, according to the counsels of his own will.

16. After my return home, I was much buffeted with temptations; but cried out, and they fled away. They returned again and again. I as often lifted up my eyes, and he sent me help from his holy place. And herein I found the difference between this and my former state chiefly consisted. I was striving, yea, fighting with all my might under the law, as well as under grace; but then I was sometimes, if not often, conquered: now I was always conqueror.

17. The moment I awaked, “Jesus, Master,” was in my heart and in my mouth; and I found all my strength lay in keeping my eye fixed upon him, and my soul waiting on him continually. Being again at St. Paul’s in the afternoon, I could taste the good word of God in the anthem, which began, “My song shall be always of the loving kindness of the Lord: with my mouth will I ever be showing forth thy truth from one generation to another.” Yet the enemy injected a fear, “If thou dost believe, why is there not a more sensible change?” I answered, (yet not I,) “That I know not. But this I know, I have now peace with God. And I sin not to-day, and Jesus my Master has forbid me to take thought for the morrow.”

18. “But is not any sort of fear,” continued the tempter, “a proof that thou dost not believe?” I desired my Master to answer for me, and opened his book upon those words of St. Paul: “Without were fightings, within were fears.” Then, inferred I, well may fears be within me; but I must go on, and tread them under my feet.