

Dr. Samuel Johnson. 1709-1784. Moralist, Teacher

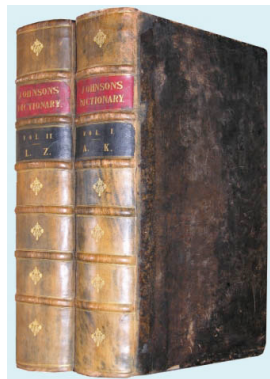
The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church says of Dr. Samuel Johnson: "His religious beliefs and practices were of a standard rare in the Church of England in the 18th century." His selection for commemoration in the Book of Common Prayer must have been influenced by a similar assessment.

Author, literary critic and moralist, Dr. Johnson's greatest literary contribution was his Dictionary of the English Language. Perhaps primarily for this he has been described as "arguably the most distinguished man of letters in English history"¹

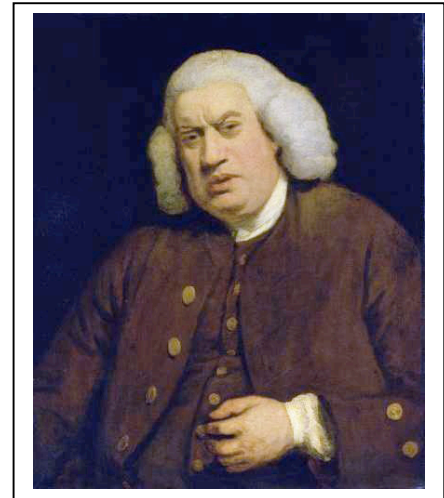
From infancy he suffered both pain and mental anguish from scrofula² and also the symptoms of Tourette's syndrome³: tics and odd gestures. This did not prevent his marriage in 1735 to the widowed Elizabeth Jervis Porter (d. 1752.)

Johnson opened Edial school near Lichfield with only three pupils, one of whom was David Garrick, the future actor. Sad to say, the school was a failure. After that Johnson traveled to London where he eventually began a prolific writing career, including a weekly series, *The Idler*.

In 1746 he was approached by a group of publishers regarding the creation of an authoritative English dictionary. It took him nine years, but was his greatest work.



Above L. to R.: Johnson and Boswell, First Edition of Johnson's Dictionary. [Notes: 1.Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 2. Scrofula: tuberculous cervical lymphadenitis, 3. Tourette's Syndrome: An inherited disorder defined as part of a spectrum of tic disorders.]

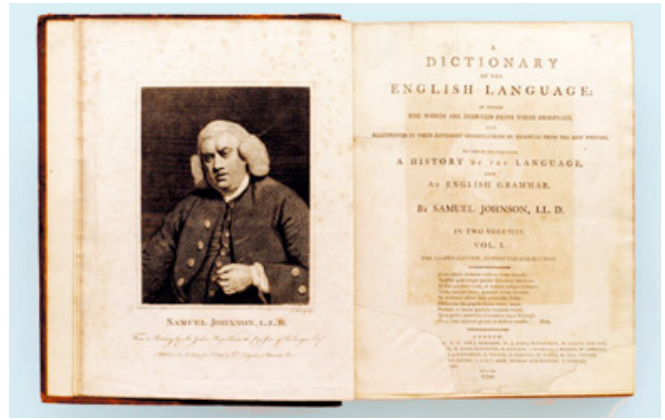


A Prayer of Samuel Johnson

"Almighty God, the giver of all good things, without whose help all labor is ineffectual, and without whose grace all wisdom is folly: grant, I beseech Thee, that in this my undertaking, thy Holy Spirit may not be withheld from me, but that I may promote Thy glory, and the salvation both of myself and others. Grant this, O Lord, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen. Lord bless me. So be it."

Below: Dr. Samuel Johnson's birthplace museum in Lichfield, England. Opened in 1901 and holds a collection of over 6,500 items relating to Johnson and his circle. There is a significant collection of manuscripts, including signed letters





Like many other great men Dr. Johnson has been accused of infidelity, loose living and other moral weaknesses. Given his busy life one wonders how he had time for it all.

Dr. Johnson's friendship with James Boswell, who was his biographer, began in 1763, and could not have brought together persons more different in temperament and morals. Boswell, charming and dissolute, admired Johnson immensely. His *Life of Dr. Samuel Johnson* is replete with praise.

In 1773 Samuel Johnson and James Boswell traveled through the Highlands of Scotland and the Hebrides. Johnson published the *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland*, in 1775, and it became one of the most popular social commentaries of its age.

A sampling of his works, all of which can be Googled:
London: A Poem (1738), *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth* (1745), *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), Essays in *The Rambler*, Nos. 1-208. (1750-52), *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), Essays in *The Idler* (1758-1760), *The Patriot* (1774), *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775), *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (1779-81), *Prayers and Meditations* (1785), *Sermons* (pub. 1820)

A Prayer of Dr. Johnson's before Holy Communion
"Grant, O Lord, that I may receive the Sacrament with such resolutions of a better life as may by thy grace be effectual, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen."



Memorial to Hodge, Dr. Johnson's Favorite Cat.

In 1997 The Lord Mayor of London dedicated a memorial outside Dr. Johnson's house in Gough Square. The bronze statue shows Hodge sitting next to a pair of oyster shells (his favorite food and cheap in the 18th century) atop a copy of Johnson's dictionary. Inscription: "A very fine cat indeed."



Francis Barber, was Dr. Johnson's faithful manservant and also his heir. After Johnson's death Barber married, but led a troubled life. His descendents still live near Lichfield, England. This portrait by either James Northcote or Sir Joshua Reynolds is believed to be Barber's likeness.