

Lives Worth Imitating – Susanna Wesley

8/4/2019

I want to begin this morning by talking about the roots to the Methodist church. And the roots can be traced back to the work primarily of two brothers: John and Charles Wesley in the early 1700's.

John Wesley is the older of the two brothers and is known as the organizational genius behind the Methodist church. He's also known as the "preacher" of the two brothers, although Charles also extensively traveled around preached as well. It's estimated that during his ministry, John rode around the area of England on horseback, averaging about 4,000 miles annually and 250,000 miles total during his lifetime. He's estimated to have preached 40,000 sermons this way.

Perhaps one of his most famous sayings was: "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can."

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Methodist teaching was the emphasis of the Holy Spirit's work in each believer's life. This gave birth to the holiness movement which inspired the Pentecostal movement.

Charles Wesley was younger than his brother John by 4 years. While attending Oxford college in England, he formed the "Holy Club." This club was formed to as an attempt to get Christians to take their walk with the Lord more seriously. They committed to each others to live disciplined Christian lives and centered around 4 disciplines:

1. Intense Bible study (3 hours every day)
2. Prayer
3. Fasting
4. Charitable works (helping the poor out and visiting the sick and prisons).

Others not in the group initially derisively called Charles a "Methodist" because he was so methodical in his Christian walk. And while those who started it were using it to mock Charles, him and others adopted it as sort of badge of courage.

Charles Wesley is often referred to as the "lesser known Wesley". However, he also rode around the countryside preaching extensively as well. But what Charles is most often known for is his extensive writing of hymns. Someone figured out that during 50 years of ministry, Charles wrote a new hymn every 2 days. He wrote a total of 8,989 hymns – which is 10 times more than any other hymn writer. No doubt you've sung many of his hymns without ever knowing it.

- O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing
- Love Divine, all Love Excelling"
- Hark the Herald Angels Sing
- And Can it Be
- Jesus, Love of My Soul
- Christ the Lord is Risen Today
- Soldiers of Christ Arise
- Rejoice! The Lord is King

Raise your hand if you've sung at least one of his hymns once in your lifetime.

But this morning, I don't want to focus on John or Charles Wesley – I want to instead focus on their remarkable mother, **Susanna Wesley**. Because, it's because of their very disciplined upbringing that clearly contributed to the way they turned out. Her life is a remarkable story of discipline, commitment to the Lord and her family and perseverance through very difficult circumstances. Susanna is often

lifted up as an ideal mother to follow, but I think she was much more than that. Men and women alike can receive great inspiration from her.

- Susanna Annesley was born January 20, 1669 as the 24th of 25 children. Her father was a very prominent and highly educated pastor in the Puritan faith in London, England. So, Susanna was very well educated and read extensively throughout her life.
- At age 13 Susanna left the Puritan faith and joined the Anglican church of England.
- At her sister's wedding, Susanna met Samuel Wesley. Over the next several years they corresponded by mail and age 19 she married him.
- Samuel was an aspiring minister, but was a tyrant within his family and to his congregation as well. He was also a very poor manager of money, which left the family often destitute and struggling to put food on the table and provide proper clothing.
- Susanna's life with Samuel was a constant challenge. He would often leave the family for various reasons for extended periods of time. Often he would leave for Conventions, which he spent quite a bit of money on. Other times he was thrown into debtors prison. One time he left Susanna after she would endorse the ruling king of England by saying "Amen" at the close of his dinner prayer. He became angry at Susanna and demanded she say "Amen" but she refused to violate her conscience in doing so (she didn't believe the current king was entitled to serve as king). So, Samuel took off and house caught fire and burned to the ground.
- The Wesley home burnt to the ground twice (the second time many believe disgruntled parishoners set it on fire out disgust over his backing of certain political candidates. At the same time they also burned down the crops he was trying to grow, stabbed several cows and the family dog and constantly threatened the entire family, including the children.
- Susanna gave birth to 19 children but only 10 of them survived infancy. Three sets of twins passed away and one baby was accidentally smothered by a nurse in charge of taking care of him (she fell asleep on him).
- One time when Charles was away at a convention, he left another man in charge of the preaching. And according to all reports, many of the parishioners, including Susanna, thought he wasn't worth listening to. So, Susanna began offering a time of worship and teaching for her family in the evenings in their home. She would read sermons, from either Charles or her father, and comment on them. Word spread outside of her family what she was doing and she welcomed them in as well. The gathering quickly grew and many of the parishioners elected not to go to church in the morning and instead attend Susanna's service Sunday evening. The fill-in preacher heard what was happening and wrote a letter complaining to Charles. Charles sent back correspondence to Susanna expressing his displeasure with her efforts and asking her to stop immediately. Susanna wrote back asserting her right to take responsibility for the spiritual teaching of the children in his absence, and if others wanted to join her why should she refuse them. And then she ended it with this carefully worded ultimatum. ***"If you do after all think fit to dissolve this assembly, do not tell me any more that you desire me to do it, for that will not satisfy my conscience; but sent me your positive command in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity of doing good to souls, when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ."*** Wow, she's saying I don't want to give an account to God for neglecting providing for the spiritual needs of these souls – but if you command me to stop then the responsibility will rest on you. Charles chose not to respond and Susanna kept on teaching and in fact when Charles finally returned he discovered the congregation had actually grown and was full of life and hope.

- We've been able to learn a lot about Susanna through her writings and the writings of her children. Remarkably, she never disparages her husband in her writings, even though she certainly had plenty of opportunity to. But she took seriously her responsibility to provide the spiritual nurture for her children, whether Charles was around or not.
- Many people point to Susanna as the pioneer in home-schooling. She took it upon herself to make sure every one of her children were taught properly. And if she couldn't find any curriculum that she felt helpful, she would write her own curriculum. School hours were from 9am to noon and 2-5pm, six days a week. And she made sure that her girls received the same quality education that her sons did, (which was unheard of at the time).
- She also planned into her schedule; time to spend at least one hour, before bedtime every evening with one of her children, so that they never felt neglected.
- Susanna's was very structured in the raising of her children. Here are 6 rules she lived by (although there were many more).

Susannah Wesley's Rules For Raising Children:

1. Subdue self-will in a child and thus work together with God to save his soul.
 2. Teach him to pray as soon as he can speak.
 3. Give him nothing he cries for and only what is good for him if he asks for it politely.
 4. To prevent lying, punish no fault which is freely confessed, but never allow a rebellious, sinful act to go unnoticed.
 5. Commend and reward good behavior.
 6. Strictly observe all promises you have made to your child.
- One of the things Susanna is most well known for is her deep commitment to spending time with God in Bible study in prayer. Early in life she vowed that she would never spend more time in leisure entertainment than she did in prayer and Bible study. And every day, she would sit in a chair and pull her apron over her head and engage in Bible study and prayer. She taught her kids that this was her time with God and not to be disturbed unless it was an absolute emergency.
 - Even when the children moved out of the house to attend college, Susanna continued to write them letters instructing them in theology, how to behave out in the world, how to find a proper spouse etc. Even after Charles and John became well known evangelists they would often consult with their mom on theology and life issues.

Susanna once wrote: *"Help me, O Lord, to make a true use of all disappointments and calamities in this life, in such a way that they may unite my heart more closely with Thee."*

What can we learn from Susanna Wesley's life:

Perseverance: I ran across a really good definition of perseverance: *"A determined continuation in something with a steady and continued action of belief that occurs over a long period of time among and despite especially difficult circumstances."*

The word for perseverance is hupo (under) and meno (to abide or stay). It means rather than trying to get out from under something, you stick it out. Susanna realized her calling in life was to raise her children to love and know the Lord. And so she set out doing just that to the best of her abilities, despite some pretty tough circumstances. Certainly one of the keys to her success was the two hours she spent with the Lord every single day (when she'd pull her apron over her head). Those two hours allowed her to keep her focus on the Lord. Otherwise, everything else could easily distract her from that.

Hebrews 12:2-3 (NIV). *And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

We are called here in Hebrews to fix our eyes on Jesus, and how did Jesus endure his hardships? He kept his heart and mind on *"the joy set before him."* What was that joy? It could have been being reunited with the Father in heaven. It could have been his commitment to complete obedience to the Father in everything that came into his life.

It could have been our re-establishing a relationship with our Heavenly Father.

But you've got to determine daily where you focus your sights, where you focus your mind and where you focus your heart. If you focus on your problems then you'll become consumed with them. But if you focus them on God, it gives you a new perspective on your problems.

"He who stands before God can stand before anyone."

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Charles Wesley:

Susannah Wesley:

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- She married Charles Wesley at age _____
- Charles Wesley was :
- The Wesley home _____
- Susanna gave birth to 19 children and ____ survived infancy
- Susanna is seen as the pioneer in _____
- She intentionally spent _____ with each child
- She was very _____ in raising the children
- How did Susanna carve out time for God daily?

Susanna: *“Help me, O Lord, to make a true use of all
_____ and calamities in this life, in such a way that they
may _____ my heart more closely with Thee.”*

Lessons to Learn from Susanna’s life:

_____: *hupo* = _____ *meno* = _____

Hebrews 12:2-3 teaches us to focus our attention on who/what?
Who/what do you tend to focus on in the midst of crisis?

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