



Selina Hastings 1707-1791

Born into an aristocratic family in 1707, Selina Shirley married Theophilus Hastings, the ninth Earl of Huntingdon, in 1728 becoming the Countess of Huntingdon. She was known as "Lady Bountiful" for her philanthropic support of the Evangelical Revival. She provided funds for the establishment of sixty-four chapels, missionary work in America, and the first Methodist theological college, Trevecca College (later Cheshunt College, now part of Westminster College). She founded "The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion," her own society of preachers in England.

Selina Hastings was guided by faith. An associate called on her one day to urge that she not open another chapel in London since she did not have the money to finish projects already begun. Selina insisted on pushing ahead. While they debated, the mail arrived. In it was this note: "An individual who has heard of Lady Huntingdon's exertions to spread the gospel, requests her acceptance of the enclosed draft." Tears of joy rolled down Selina's cheeks. Enclosed was 500 pounds, the very sum needed.

Her faith had not always been so confident. By June 1739, the birth of seven babies in rapid succession had left Selina with gynecological injuries and frequent "colic." Some of the best doctors in England examined her, but she seemed only to get worse and feared for her life. And in the hidden recesses of her heart, she hugged a secret dread.

Selina feared for her soul. It seemed to her that she always fell short of the standard God asks. No matter what she did, she felt the distance between herself and God widening. July, 1739, marked a turning point in Selina's faith. She remembered something her sister-in-law had said. Lady Margaret Hastings, despite ridicule, was attending the meetings of Benjamin Ingham, a Moravian closely associated with John and Charles Wesley, the Methodist leaders. What Margaret said to Selina was this: "Since I have known and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, I have been as happy as an angel." As Selina pondered these words, a truth suggested itself to her. She could expect pardon for her bad attitudes and raging temper, not because of any good she had done but only because Jesus offered it as a free gift. "I believe!" she cried.

After attending the Wesleys' 1739 Fetter Street meetings, Selina became enthusiastic about the Methodists and imitated them. At once she sent one of her own staff, David Taylor, to preach in the fields and pleaded with her employees to become spiritually minded.

"Thomas, I fear you never pray, or look to Christ for salvation," she said to one of her employees.

"Your ladyship is mistaken," replied Thomas. "I heard what passed between you and James at the garden wall, and the word you meant for him took effect on me."

"How did you hear it?" she asked.

"Through the hole in the wall and I shall never forget the impression I received."

After her husband died in 1746, she decided to live her life "labouring in prayer, exercising her personal witness and using her wealth and influence to the fullest extent possible in the furtherance of the Gospel." Or, in her own words, "None know how to prize the Saviour, but such as are zealous in pious works for others." As Paul said in Romans 1:14–15, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." Likewise, the love of Christ constrained Lady Huntingdon to worship God and give to others so that more might trust in Him.

Selina wrote letters to her friends – duchesses and leading ladies – assuring them that having Christ as a companion would transform their lives. She coaxed several to attend chapel with her and was disappointed when they weren't converted. But if the rich closed their ears to the gospel, common folk listened. Selina hired zealous speakers and whenever she took a summer holiday, she had them preach to crowds at every stop, winning many converts to Christ and building more than sixty chapels so the common folk of England might have a place to worship.