



SUSANNA WESLEY 1669 - 1742

Susanna Wesley was the mother of John and Charles Wesley, founders of worldwide Methodism. Married to Samuel Wesley, an Anglican minister, for 44 years she bore between seventeen and nineteen children; ten survived. Theirs was not an easy marriage. They suffered illness, disease, poverty, and the death of children. Fire twice destroyed their home. But through it all Susanna accepted the will of God and placed herself and her family in His hands.

The frequent absences of her husband on church business left the management of the household in her hands. Through it all she remained a steadfast Christian who taught not only the Scriptures, but through her own example of daily trust in God.

The children were raised strictly. They were taught to cry softly, to eat what was put before them, and not to raise their voices or play noisily. Physical punishment was used, but confession of faults could avoid it. All but one of the children learned to read from the age of five, including the girls. Susanna made it a rule for herself to spend an hour a day with each of the children over the period of a week.

After the fire of 1709, she paid special attention to John, who was almost lost in the fire. It is said that at the age of six or seven John thought he would never marry "because I could never find such a woman as my father had."

After Samuel Wesley died in 1735, Susanna lived with her children, especially, in her last year, with John. She died in 1742 and was buried in London's Bunhill Fields, where John Bunyan and Isaac Watts are also buried. Her sons won tens of thousands of souls to Christ. She would not have wished for more.



JOHN WESLEY 1703 - 1792

John Wesley's rules for living: "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."

John was the 14th child born in 1703 to Samuel and Susanna Wesley. From his parents he developed excellent study habits and physical discipline. He went to college at Oxford where he studied and pursued a holy life. He became the leader of a group called the Holy Club and much later came to realize that they followed more the letter than the spirit of Christianity.

He spent a brief time in America with his brother, Charles, but in returning to England he came to realize that a proper faith will result in a sense of assurance of salvation. Such a faith will be accompanied by love, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Such a heart-centered experience was necessary for one to become a true Christian.

His real work began as he started to travel and preach at age 37. Large crowds came out to hear him. He would preach in pulpits and open fields. He would preach three times a day, beginning at 5:00 a.m. since workers could stop to hear him as they walked to their daily drudgery.

Sometimes he covered 60 miles in a day on horseback, and often travelled over 4,500 miles by land and sea in a year. In all he went to Ireland 42 times and to Scotland 22 times. Sometimes he would return to a city and record that the little society he had helped form was still intact and faithful. These societies provided the local organization for the Methodist movement.

Wesley preached thrift, cleanliness, honesty, salvation, good family relations, and dozens of other themes. But above all, he preached faith in Christ. He translated hymns, interpreted Scripture, wrote hundreds of letters, trained hundreds of men and women, and kept his journals.

Wesley's Arminian theology taught that everyone could find God's grace to resist evil and to be saved, if only they would seek and receive it. He ordained men, even though he wasn't an Anglican bishop, and sent them to America in 1784 effectively starting a new church. Methodists soon became the fastest growing and largest denomination in the United States.

At his death in 1791 there were 79,000 Methodists in England and 40,000 in America. By 1957 there were 40 million Methodists worldwide. Today there are over 308 million.



CHARLES WESLEY 1707 - 1788

Charles was educated at Westminster School and entered Christ Church at Oxford at the same time his older brother, John, was leaving to help in his father's church. Both men traveled to America (the colony of Georgia) as missionaries for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. They realized that hymn singing could be a spiritual experience. Charles became ill and only stayed in Georgia four months; John stayed another year. John printed a "Collection of Psalms and Hymns" for use in his congregations. Half the songs were by Isaac Watts. The community was not pleased and a grand jury charged John (among other things) with "introducing into the church . . . hymns not authorized." John fled the colony before his case came to trial.

Back at Oxford, after his brief stay in Georgia, Charles came face to face with the claims of Christ. May 21, 1738 marks the date of Charles' conversion, and on that date he opened the Bible to Psalm 40:3, "He hath put a new song in my mouth; many will see and fear and will trust in the Lord." Charles had indeed received a new song, and the next day he started his first hymn, probably "And Can It Be?" This was the first of over 6,500 hymns Charles wrote. For decades there poured forth from him an unstoppable stream of spiritual songs. He composed an average of three hymns a week.

The two brothers became zealous preachers. Hymn singing was very important to the evangelical revival in the eighteenth century; hymns were both a means of expressing joy and teaching Scriptural truth. Charles' hymns often paraphrased Scripture as well as the Anglican Prayer Book. They were always full of praise and they continue to enrich us today. It's difficult to imagine a hymnbook without such hymns as Charles Wesley's "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing," "Rejoice, the Lord Is King," "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," and "Hark the Herald Angels Sing."