

## **Susanna Wesley**

If you think of personal disciplines, prayer, homeschooling and lots of children, you probably know something of Susanna Wesley. You might also know that she was the mother of two famous theologians: John and Charles Wesley. Her son, John was the founder of what is called *Methodism* or *Wesleyanism*.

So, let me introduce her to you by starting with a bit of her early history.

### **Early History**

Susanna Annesley Wesley was born on January 20, 1669 in London to Mary and Samuel Annesley. Susanna was their youngest child: number twenty-five. Her Dad was a Puritan pastor and gave her an excellent education. Susanna was very close with her father. They had many things in common, including a love of books and a deep interest in theological talks (which began at a very young age). She would rather be talking theology with her father in the library or have her nose in a theological book, than anything else.

She was said to have been very pretty. As a young woman she had beautiful dark silky hair and her beautiful blue eyes. As she grew into a young woman, she was not only pretty, but also very well-learned. She could read Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, and could hold her own in discussing theology with seminarians.

She was a woman of convictions. She walked to the drum of her own beat. Even though she loved and respected her father, at the age 13 she left her father's church and became part of the Anglican Church or also known as the Church of England. This departure from her Puritan upbringing to the State Church had, I believe, a profound impact on her theology (a topic I won't get into in this presentation).

At 19 she married a Samuel Wesley who was also committed to the Church of England. Talking about her marriage . . .

### **Marriage**

Arnold Dallimore in his book, "Susanna Wesley" wrote: "Married life was not proving a great success from Susanna's point of view. Not only was she not allowed a mind of her own, they were also living in poverty and her husband was constantly in debt. She had grown up in her father's comfortable home, but since marrying Samuel Wesley she had lived, first in the boarding-house, and now in this primitive

Elk Point Baptist Church

Mother's Day

Box 298, Elk Point Alberta T0A 1A0

780 724-4194

rectory at South Ormsby. Similarly, her father had never known financial need, but it was becoming obvious that Samuel would probably remain in debt for the rest of his days. So, by the time she had been married a few months, Susanna must have come to realize that submission and poverty were likely to be permanent features of her life.”

Later in life she wrote, “Old as I am, since I have taken my husband ‘for better for worse,’ I’ll take my residence with him. Where he lives, will I live; and where he dies, will I die; and there will I be buried. God do so unto me, and more also, if aught but death part him and me.

Samuel Wesley, Susanna’s husband, went to be with the Lord on April 25, 1735 at the age of seventy-three. They had been married for approximately forty-six years.

Susanna is best known for her parenting and discipline.

### **Discipline and Parenting**

Bishop John Howe, a contemporary Anglican priest and bishop wrote, “Her assiduity [diligence] in her religious course, the seasons, order, and constancy whereof seemed to be governed by the ordinances of heaven, that as certain the succession of day and night; so that one might as soon divert the course of the sun, as turn her from her daily course in religious duties; this argued a steady principle and of the highest excellency, that of Divine love.”

Just stop and think for a moment about what life in the late 1600s might be like for a family of 19 children. Susanna gave birth to 19 children. 9 died in infancy. She raised 10 children as a homeschooling mom. How did she do that. Well as Bishop Howe wrote she was so disciplined nothing would knock her off her schedule and her rules. Here’s an example of some of her parenting rules:

1. Children will be taught to pray as soon as they can speak.
2. Children will not receive what they cry for, and only what they ask for politely.
3. To prevent lying, children will not be punished for what they confess and repent of.
4. Children will not be punished twice for a single offense.
5. Good behavior will be commended and rewarded.
6. Any attempt to please, no matter how poorly performed, will be commended.

Elk Point Baptist Church

Mother’s Day

Box 298, Elk Point Alberta T0A 1A0

780 724-4194

7. Property rights will be preserved, even in minute matters.
8. Children will be taught to fear the Lord.

School hours in the Wesley home were from 9:00 a.m. to noon and then 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., six days a week. As a homeschool mom, she somehow found a way to manage the household and give her large brood of children a world-class education that included both classical and biblical learning. Her girls got the same rigorous education as did her boys, something virtually unheard of in that day. Traditionally, girls of that place and time were taught “feminine” skills such as needlework and music before undertaking the most basic education, such as learning to read. Susanna firmly believed this was wrong-headed. Her girls were taught the same curriculum as her boys.

She spent 2 hours a day in prayer, herself. Early in her life, she vowed that she would never spend more time in leisure entertainment than she did in prayer and Bible study. Even as a busy wife, mother and teacher, she still scheduled two hours each day for Bible reading and prayer. In addition, she spent one hour of face-to-face time with each of her 10 children.

Her disciplined life was not without great patience. Once when coming upon Susanna calmly teaching one of the children, her husband remarked, "I marvel at your patience! You have told that child the same thing twenty times." Looking fondly at the child, Susanna replied, "Had I spoken the matter only nineteen times, I should have lost all my labor."

Many have wondered about her conversion . . .

### **Susanna's Conversion**

History does not make it clear when Susanna trusted Christ. Some think she was converted as a young girl while living in her father's home. But “two years before she died, she had an experience which her sons Charles and John regarded as her conversion.” In fact, John and Charles Wesley seemed to think her whole life up to that moment was lived under legalism and rules, and that it did not necessarily reflect true conversion.

Other biographers think that in fact she was saved and even though she was very spiritually motivated in all she did, it wasn't until this latter experience that she had, do she have assurance of salvation – that deep comfort of the Gospel.

Elk Point Baptist Church

Mother's Day

Box 298, Elk Point Alberta T0A 1A0

780 724-4194

Others would say that her spirit and her life must be evidence that she had true faith. The fact of the matter is that other than the testimony of her sons, we have no concrete evidence of her conversion and assurance of salvation to a few years before she died. That is a complex mystery.

Speaking of her children, we are confronted with another paradox.

### **Her Children**

Of the seven bright daughters of Samuel and Susanna, five had marriages that were unsatisfactory, and at least two were disastrous. One of their daughters had a child out of wedlock. This daughter married a drunk and their life went into an ever-deepening tragedy.

It is a great mystery that despite her conscientious and devout home, her own marriage and the marriages of her children were problematic. Her life was full of great trials. Through her life, she will be best known for her perseverance.

### **Perseverance**

Think of it: she experienced sickness and the death of nine children. One of her daughters had a pregnancy out of wedlock. She endured her husband's many imprisonments, continuous money problems, and ultimately the sorrow of being a widow. Because she and her husband, Samuel, worked so hard to shape their children in deep Christian learning and devotion, you would think that each of their children would grow up to marry well and establish their own devout Christian families, yet it did not work out that way. Many of us can imagine the heart wrenching disappointment. The question that I had as I read the various accounts of her life was this, "How did she do it?" I observed 3 things that I think contributed to her ability to persevere patiently.

### **The Fuel of a Persevering Lifestyle**

The New Testament equates the word perseverance with endurance. James draws on the example of Job to describe perseverance. *"As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful."* (James 5:10–11, ESV)

By James' thought, perseverance is that ability to remain steadfast under difficult situations. Jesus taught that when the Word of God is planted in good soil, those people *"bear fruit with patience."* (Luke

Elk Point Baptist Church

Mother's Day

Box 298, Elk Point Alberta T0A 1A0

780 724-4194

8:15, ESV). Paul teaches us that by God's design "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character."<sup>1</sup> The writer to the Hebrews shows us that God not only blesses, but rewards those who endure. He says to the recipients of the Letter: "*For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.*" (Hebrews 10:36, ESV).

From her life story, how did Susanna persevere, endure to the end? I noticed first ....

### 1. The Importance of Self-Examination

One biographer wrote, "Mrs. Wesley also attached great importance to the duty of self-examination, as a means of spiritual improvement." John Kirk in his biography of her records these words from her diary:

"You, above all others, have most need of humbling yourself before the great and holy God, for the very great and very many sins you daily are guilty of, in thought, word, and deed, against His Divine Majesty."

Imagine this lady and the life she was experiencing, and this is what she writes, "You above all others have need of humbling yourself before the great and holy God." She went out to mourn the lack of seriousness of her thoughts. She grieved over the many lost opportunities she had and how little she considered and spoke of the greatness and the worthiness of God.

Thomas Watson wrote in his book, *The Godly Man's Picture*: "A humble soul thinks better of others than of himself: 'let each esteem others better than themselves' . . . A humble Christian studies his own infirmities and another's excellences and make him put a higher value upon others than himself."

Susanna Wesley considered her own heart, her own sin as far more serious a concern than her circumstance. But that wasn't all . . .

### 2. The Importance of Prayer

John Kirk wrote, "The constant prayerfulness of her spirit commends itself to our strongest admiration. She believed that, under all circumstances, it was her privilege to seek and obtain Divine guidance and help. Prayer was, indeed, her very life. In it her great strength lay, and by it she overcame."

---

<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#). (2016). (Ro 5:3-4). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Elk Point Baptist Church

Mother's Day

Box 298, Elk Point Alberta T0A 1A0

780 724-4194

We have before us the witness of Scripture: *“do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

(Philippians 4:6–7, ESV)

For most of us, women or men, mothers or fathers, we ought to know the comfort and consolation of true prayer. Before Susanna Wesley would enter prayer, she would spend up to 15 minutes of preparing her soul to worship. She believed prayer was worship. She also spent a similar amount of time seeking cleansing from sin. We are well aware now of the great discipline she had in prayer. One biographer wrote:

“If a passing stranger walking through the rural village of Epworth, England, on any given day between 1700 and 1720 had peered through the window of the home of the rector of the local Anglican church, he might have caught sight of something quite strange. Depending on the time of day, this observer might have seen a woman sitting in a chair with her kitchen apron pulled up over her head while ten children read, studied, or played all around her.”

I believe this was an essential key to her ability to endure to the end. But this was not a begrudgingly, stoic, unhappy perseverance.

### 3. The Importance of Joy.

Someone wrote of her, “She possessed great natural calmness and fortitude; but the joy of the Lord was her strength. This was the secret power which sustained her in every trial, and finally gave her a happy issue out of all her afflictions.”

In Paul’s letter to Philippi, just before he exhorts them to not be anxious and to pray about all things, he wrote: *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”* (Philippians 4:4, ESV). The New Testament teaches us that when our thoughts are focused beyond this life through to the glories afforded to every Christian, we can have joy in any circumstance. Paul wrote, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”* (Romans 8:18, ESV)

Later the same apostle wrote, *“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”* (2 Corinthians 4:17–18, ESV)

Elk Point Baptist Church

Mother’s Day

Box 298, Elk Point Alberta T0A 1A0

780 724-4194

A cursory study of suffering in the Bible teaches us that suffering produces character, enduring difficulty proves the genuineness of your faith, suffering prepares us for unspeakable glory in the life to come. The Bible also teaches us that joy is a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a fruit of the Spirit. And the Bible teaches us the joy that Jesus gives cannot be taken away.

### **Conclusion/Application**

There are many mysteries to Susanna's life. We might rightly wonder why she left the sound doctrine of her upbringing to embrace a man-centered, works focused State Church. One might wonder what she saw in a man that we ego-centric, rude and failed to provide adequately for her. One might wonder how such a devout, rigorous lady would go through most of her life without know the comfort of the Holy Spirit's assurance. One might wonder how the poor marriages of her children would end up to be the legacy of her diligent and disciplined teaching. There are many mysteries.

But if you wonder how she stood the test and trials. If you wonder how she endured. If you wonder how she persevered to her final glory, this is no mystery. She chose to look at her own faults and failures before others. She spent hours in prayer and worship. And she lived with great joy, "looking onto Jesus the author and finisher of her faith." Her son, Charles was later to write these words in a familiar hymn:

*Jesus! the name that charms our fears,  
that bids our sorrows cease,  
'tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'tis life and health and peace.*

Gospel → <https://www.elkpointbaptistchurch.com/about/im-new>

### **Reading List**

1. Comfort, Ray. Susanna Wesley: Her Remarkable Life . ReadHowYouWant. Kindle Edition.
2. Dallimore, Arnold A., Susanna Wesley, The Mother of John & Charles Wesley, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1993
3. Kirk, John. Susanna: The Mother of the Wesleys, Kindle Edition.
4. Online Articles:
  - a. [https://myhero.com/S\\_Wesley\\_potter\\_US\\_2010](https://myhero.com/S_Wesley_potter_US_2010)

Elk Point Baptist Church

Mother's Day

Box 298, Elk Point Alberta T0A 1A0

780 724-4194

- b. <http://www.raisinggodlychildren.org/2011/03/16-house-rules-by-susannah-wesley-john-wesleys-mom.html>
  - c. [https://www.faithgateway.com/praying-example-susanna-wesley/#.W\\_swOboTGec](https://www.faithgateway.com/praying-example-susanna-wesley/#.W_swOboTGec)
  - d. <https://bible.org/seriespage/5-susanna-wesley-portrait-perseverance>
  - e. <https://blog.logos.com/2012/01/susanna-wesley-the-mother-of-methodism/>
5. For those that have PUREFLIX.COM: <https://pureflix.com/videos/253278758877/watch>

Elk Point Baptist Church

Mother's Day

Box 298, Elk Point Alberta T0A 1A0

780 724-4194