



Introduction



Ever since Bible days devout women have played an indispensable role in helping to support and advance the work of God's kingdom on earth. In Old Testament times such women as Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Ruth and Esther were strategically used of the Lord to serve His people and help bring about His purposes. A number of women in the Gospels provided Christ and His Disciples with financial and moral support (Luke 8:1-3; 10:38-40; 23:27, 49, 55-56). In Acts and the epistles Dorcas, Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla, Euodia, Syntyche and other women received high commendation for their service of the saints and their work in the cause of the Gospel (Acts 9:36-39; 16:14-15; Rom.16:1-6, 12; Phil. 4:2-3).

From the pages of church history, especially following the Reformation, numerous examples can be cited of women who (without intending to do so) gained renown for their exceptional Christian piety and service. The current volume presents abbreviated biographical accounts of the lives and ministries of five such outstanding women from the past three centuries – Susanna Wesley, Fanny Crosby, Catherine Booth, Mary Slessor and Corrie ten Boom.





WOMEN OF FAITH AND COURAGE

Susanna Wesley (1669-1742) was the godly mother of John and Charles Wesley, key players in England's evangelical revival and founders of the Methodist movement in the eighteenth century. She faithfully supported and helped to strengthen the ministry of her oftentimes-difficult husband, Samuel, a clergyman in the Church of England. Susanna also poured her life into the educating and scrupulous spiritual upbringing of her numerous children. Her life models the shaping of an exceptional character through assorted trials, including religious persecution, financial deprivation, family heartache and poor health.

In an era filled with prominent Gospel song composers, Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) became the world's premiere hymnwriter. Blind from six weeks of age, she wrote nearly 9,000 hymns in her lifetime, including a number that are still sung today – to name but a few, 'All the Way My Savior Leads Me', 'Blessed Assurance', 'He Hideth My Soul', 'I Am Thine, O Lord', 'Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross', 'Redeemed', 'Rescue the Perishing', 'Tell Me the Story of Jesus' and 'To God Be the Glory'. A Presbyterian by upbringing, Fanny ministered in various denominational settings as an adult. Well into her eighties, she traveled widely, ministering in churches, Bible conferences, rescue missions, YMCAs, patriotic rallies and various other settings.

Catherine Booth (1829-1890) is commonly thought of as the mother of the Salvation Army, having co-founded it with her husband, William. Before that time they were involved in itinerant evangelistic ministry with the Methodists. The Salvation Army, which experienced explosive growth and spread to a number of countries in the Booths' lifetime, emphasized ministry to the spiritual and material needs of the lower classes of society. For over three





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decades Catherine carried on a powerful public speaking ministry, becoming the pre-eminent female preacher of her generation. The pronounced influence she and her husband had on their nine children (including an adopted son) resulted in all of them growing up to become devoted believers, most entering vocational Christian service.

Mary Slessor (1848-1915), a Scottish Presbyterian, overcame a difficult childhood that included coping with an alcoholic father, grinding family poverty and exhausting labor in a textile mill as the primary provider for her mother and siblings. She went on to invest thirty-eight years of her life in carrying the Gospel to savage, degraded tribes in the dense forests of Calabar (southern Nigeria), West Africa. Mary courageously pioneered in areas that other missionaries and even traders avoided, planting churches and schools in several locations. Through her efforts, a variety of unthinkable pagan practices were eliminated or greatly reduced, and many individuals were led to saving faith in Christ.

Corrie ten Boom (1892-1983) is well known as one of the brave Dutch Reformed Christians who assisted and sheltered Jewish people and other fugitives during the German occupation of Holland in World War 2. After being arrested for their underground work, Corrie and her sister, Betsie, carried out a phenomenal ministry of Christian witness and mercy in the Nazi concentration camps where they were incarcerated. Following her providential release, Corrie returned to Holland where she established a recovery ministry to victims of the war. She devoted the final three decades of her life to itinerant evangelistic ministry in more than sixty countries throughout the world.





WOMEN OF FAITH AND COURAGE

The examples of these women have tremendous potential to inspire and instruct contemporary believers – male and female, younger and older – in various aspects of the Christian life. They model devotion to Christ and sacrificial service of His kingdom. They show how to balance one's family and ministry responsibilities. Susanna, Fanny, Catherine, Mary and Corrie exemplify a compassionate and practical response to the spiritual and physical needs of others. These women earnestly evangelized perishing unbelievers who needed the Savior. They exercised steadfast faith in God to supply their material needs, to help them carry out their ministries and to see them through overwhelming circumstances.

By no means were they nearly perfect. They wrestled with fears, frustrations, discouragements and temptations. All were well aware of their personal weaknesses, shortcomings and failures. Such personal struggles and inadequacies helped keep them from pride, gave them increased gentleness in ministering to fellow strugglers and caused them to lean more heavily on the Lord for His grace and enablement. The fact that they were less than perfect encourages other Christians by reminding them how greatly God is able to use deficient individuals who are thoroughly consecrated to Him. Susanna Wesley, Fanny Crosby, Catherine Booth, Mary Slessor and Corrie ten Boom also serve as a reminder that when God accomplishes significant things through imperfect people, He (rather than they) deserves the glory.

