

**STUDY GUIDE, *PORTRAIT OF SUSANNA***  
*The Story of Susanna Wesley*

Prepared by Lynette Bennett Danskin and Dr. Warren L. Danskin

Looking down the list of the great Christians of history, we see the names of pastors, scholars, missionaries, writers, Bible translators, martyrs and saints who served as pioneers of the spirit, stepping forward boldly to meet the challenges of their times. Many of them became famous in their own time. Others did not. Often, the powerful witness of women was denied the visibility it deserved. Such was the case of Susanna Wesley, an English woman who, by her own account, lived a “quiet, retiring life”, raising a large family in an obscure village and yet influencing a religious movement which would include millions of people of many denominations throughout the world.

Out of a life of conflict and danger Susanna Wesley, mother of John Wesley, brought a new vitality to the religious life of the world. Married to Anglican pastor Samuel Wesley, she gave birth to 19 children. Amidst the hardships of an impoverished early eighteenth century English home, she trained her sons, John and Charles Wesley, in a style of Christian discipline and spirituality that would forever leave its mark on world Christianity. The dramatic power of the Christian witness of this “Mother of Methodism” lived on as her sons’ ministries of preaching, organizing and singing changed history. Susanna inspired her people as they struggled not only to survive in harsh times but to live triumphant lives of faith. Susanna’s courage and devotion reveal a message for today.

Professional actor/singer/writer Lynette Bennett Danskin has created a dramatic monologue in order to celebrate Susanna Wesley’s influence on world Methodism and to point out her major contributions to the United Methodist Church. The new videotape, *Portrait of Susanna, The Story of Susanna Wesley*, shows some of the ways in which she did “mother” Methodism. In two versions, 40 minutes and 21:56 minutes in length, it is suitable for viewing by all ages. Also, the 40 minute video can be shown in its entirety or it can be shown in two 20-minute segments. The leader may want to share the glossary of terms ahead of time to help the audience understand the 18<sup>th</sup> century language.

Susanna Annesley Wesley (1669-1742) was born in London of a distinguished Anglican rector father and a very religious mother, Dr. Samuel and Mary Annesley. Two of Susanna's sons, John and Charles Wesley, while at Oxford University in 1730, held the first meeting of the Holy Club, which became the Methodist movement within The Church of England.

Suggestions for Group Discussion:

1. What did you know about Susanna Wesley before you saw this video?
2. What did you feel toward Susanna? Admiration? Pity? Disagreement?
3. Do you think that Susanna Wesley was the Mother of Methodism? Why or why not? Who else might deserve the title? Who are some important women in Methodism today? In your church?
4. If John Wesley had died in the fire as a five-year-old how would your life have been different?
5. Was Susanna correct in saying that John Wesley ("Little Jacky") was "...a brand plucked out of the burning"? (Zechariah 3:1-5 and Amos 4:11)  
Do you know someone that you think has a God-given purpose in life?
6. Samuel Jr., John and Charles were sent away to boarding school to study when they were 8-10 years of age. Was that a good idea? Why were the Wesley daughters not sent away to school? When do you think a young person should be ready to leave home?
7. How does the music enhance the story? Are any of the hymns familiar to you?
8. What is your favorite story from this monologue? Why?
9. What did Susanna Wesley mean by saying that an obedient child, "... shall not be beaten"? How should parents set boundaries for their children without being abusive?

What are the differences in discipline, for children, between Susanna's day and ours?

10. Can you identify with life in the Wesley household? How?
11. Did it surprise you that the family used nicknames? Suky, Sammy, Jacky, Kezzy. How does this affect your feeling toward the Wesley family?
12. How do you feel about Susanna's being assertive with Samuel and thinking for herself (desiring her own "liberty of conscience") in politics and in planning and leading the kitchen services in his absence? What alternatives did she have? How are decisions made in your family?
13. What kind of a husband and father was Samuel Wesley? Would he be comfortable in today's church? In today's culture?
14. What might Samuel have done to bridge the gap between himself and the hostile villagers and farmers of the fen country? Is there a gap today between churches and their communities? If so, how might contemporary churches bridge that gap?
15. What was Samuel's attitude toward birth control? How should men in our society/culture take responsibility for the creation and raising of children?
16. What are some things for which you would like to thank Susanna?

**The Following Are Suggestions For Further Reading and Study:**

Green, V.H.H., *John Wesley*, Lanham, Maryland; London: University Press of America, Inc., 1987

Harmon, Rebecca Lamar, *Susanna, Mother of the Wesleys*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968

Heitzenrater, Richard P., *Volume one; The Elusive Mr. Wesley. John Wesley His Own Biographer*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984.

Heitzenrater, Richard P., *Volume Two: The Elusive Mr. Wesley, John Wesley As Seen by Contemporaries and Biographers*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984

Heizenrater, Richard P., *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*,  
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995.

Pudney, John, *John Wesley and His World*, London: Thames and Hudson,  
1978

Wallace, Charles, Jr., Editor, *Susanna Wesley, The Complete Writings*, New  
York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997

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