



INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of evangelical women are familiar with Charles Haddon Spurgeon's legendary preaching ministry. Most would know that he was married, but they might not quickly call to mind his wife's name, Susannah. Most are also aware of Martin Luther's legacy and may know something about the interesting love story which he and his wife Katie shared. Yet, since Katie was born during the last year of the fifteenth century, it's not surprising that our knowledge of her is quite limited, at best. Susannah Spurgeon, by contrast, was born 333 years later—though admittedly that's close to 200 years ago. Of course, it helps that we speak the same language as she did, so we can easily read her writings.

The famous Charles H. Spurgeon was truly a giant of a man. His sermons, letters and books are rightly studied not only by Baptists, but by Protestants around the world. Much is written about this gifted and anointed man, who was remarkable in his zeal for the Lord during his fifty-seven years on this earth. Perhaps it is all too common for Susannah Spurgeon's story to be minimized simply because her husband's story is so epic. It is difficult to overstate what a gift Charles H. Spurgeon's rather short life and ministry were to the Christian church. It is likely that you know the staggering statistics that tell part of the story. He preached to an estimated ten million people

in his lifetime; he preached about 3,600 sermons and often up to ten times per week. His collected sermons compose the largest set of writings in the history of the Christian church. Even believers who know little about him are familiar with his classic *Morning and Evening* devotional which provides a snapshot of his keen biblical wisdom, encouraging so many of us for generations.

What a joy it is to seek to appreciate his ministry even more by delving into the life story of the woman whom he adored and affectionately called “Wifey.” The trite and overused idiom “behind every great man is a great woman” does not begin to explain who she was and how the Lord used her in untold ways. Nonetheless, that idiom often turns out to be true.

I have learned a great deal about this most unusual couple and the phenomenal impact that they made for the kingdom of Christ. Often known as “Mrs. C.H. Spurgeon,” it seems to border on disrespect to refer to her in this book as “Susannah” or her chosen nickname of “Susie.” Her lifespan almost identically matched the reign of Queen Victoria, so it comes as no surprise that there is no lack of formality when reading of her in the context of that era.

I once heard a well-known American pastor extol the virtues of Charles Spurgeon, often called the “prince of preachers.” He rattled off an impressive list of his amazing accomplishments. As a bit of a postscript, he added that Spurgeon was married, but his wife was an invalid who rarely heard him preach. Wow! What a massive understatement that is unfair to both Charles and Susannah.

Yes, he was married all right. Spurgeon described his wife as “God’s best earthly gift,” and said, “She has often been an angel of God to me.”¹ Yes, admittedly she suffered from chronic health issues, but so did he. It should be noted that chronic illness was not uncommon in Victorian England—and people were not seen in public if they were not well. Susie rarely heard him preach, but she was his partner in ministry in spite of her physical limitations. I take offense on her behalf

1. C.H. Spurgeon, *C.H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography: Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records by His Wife and Private Secretary* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1897-99), 2:215.

INTRODUCTION

for the simple descriptor of “invalid.” She had a beautiful name—Susannah—and even a cute nickname—Susie. And yes, she was confined to her home for many years due to illness. Mrs. Spurgeon surely did not seek the praise or recognition of men, but I am glad to draw attention to what is, for many, an unknown story. She was a stellar wife who found a way, by God’s grace, to do amazing work for her Savior in spite of devastating health issues. She was proud beyond measure to be Mrs. C.H. Spurgeon. But let’s remember her first name too.

Sometimes that first name is spelled Susannah and other times Susanna by the authors I will be quoting. Mrs. Spurgeon’s own mother and her dear friend and cousin were also named Susannah, so that’s where it can get confusing. I will sometimes refer to Susannah Thompson Spurgeon as “Mrs. Spurgeon” and sometimes as “Susannah” and most often as “Susie”—but they all refer to the one and only subject of this book.

Theirs was a rare ministry marriage. Yet it was not some kind of long storybook romance free from adversity. On the contrary, the Lord gave them just thirty-six years together and, as mentioned above, not one but both of them had debilitating health issues. Their writings are a precious treasure trove that give us clear insight into how the Lord knitted them together to His glory.

Two fine biographies of Susannah Spurgeon have been written by two gifted men: Charles Ray and Ray Rhodes. How grateful I am for their hard work, separated by more than 100 years!

My goal is to write about what we as women—primarily women married to men in ministry, but also to Christian women in general—can learn from the remarkable life of Susannah Thompson Spurgeon. I am neither a biographer nor a historian. But I have been a ministry wife for forty years and counting, and have been training future ministry wives for twenty-five years, so I have some stories to tell. As an author, I will draw from the extensive material that has been published by, and about, the Spurgeons, and use it to inspire and challenge us even as we consider contemporary circumstances in church life and ministry. I will include some

examples from my own experience as the wife of R. Albert Mohler! I will gladly rely on the fine work done by Susannah's above-mentioned biographers, and quote both frequently. I will also quote from primary source material from the pens of both Charles and Susie, to highlight what seem to me to be important talking points for us.

I have an inquisitive nature. Many questions come to mind which I would like to ask, for which there are no answers this side of heaven. To some degree, Mrs. Spurgeon held things rather close to her chest in her Victorian-era London setting. For example, we have access to Charles' letters to Susie, but not Susie's letters to Charles. Entire volumes are written about Charles' childhood, but we know very little about Susie's. It would be a luxury to find that she had penned her top ten tips for parenting twins, or boys—or even just parenting in general. But alas, no such lists exists. Ditto for any information about how her sons met their wives or what kind of relationship she had with her daughters-in-law. Very little is known about her role as a grandmother, aside from her chosen name of Grandmama. How I wish she had left us a manual for ministry wives who seek to honor the Lord through the course of overwhelming criticism, controversy, tragedy, chronic illness and long separation. How did she interact with other ministry wives? What were the greatest joys and challenges of being married to such a famous pastor? Did she teach the wives of the married students in the Pastors' College started by her husband? Did she have treasured and trusted long-term friends in whom she could confide? How exciting was it to have her twin sons follow the Lord when called to ministry? All of these are questions that will go unanswered for now. I do look forward to meeting Susannah in heaven one day to discuss any number of issues, big and small.

We have exactly what information we are meant to have about her life. I will not try to unduly stretch quotes we have from her in order to fit a topic, as I hope no one would ever do for me. One of the most amazing things learned from my study of this dear sister in Christ is her keen ability to write with clarity and passion about the things of the Lord. Thus, I have included a chapter that will endeavor to share with you

INTRODUCTION

lots of block quotes taken from her own writings, and then seek to think through how those clearly apply to us today, based on God's timeless Word. Her devotional writings have now become some of my most frequently referenced books. I had no idea what I had been missing all of these years.

I hope that you, my readers, will learn even a fraction of what I have learned as we move through the six areas I have chosen to reflect on, and how, in turn, we can apply those today. We will look at her life prior to marriage; her life as a devoted wife; her diligence in home and ministry; her response to suffering; her response to controversy and her life as a widow, with the final chapter featuring timeless truths from Susannah's own writings that should encourage and inspire us today. Note that each chapter title is drawn from a quote either made by the Spurgeons or made about Susie. Reflection questions are included at the end of each chapter that will hopefully enhance either a personal or group study.

This book's subtitle is taken from one of Susie's three devotional books. She wrote *A Carillon of Bells* in 1896, just four years after her husband's death. I think the words "joyful eagerness" capture her Christian walk so well. Here is the quote in context although a longer version is included in chapter 7:

O Lord, pity me, and pardon me! Awaken my soul to an earnest sense of the solemn responsibility involved in belonging to you, and bearing your name. Rouse in me, Lord, a joyful eagerness to become all that you wish me to be. Fill me with that mighty influence which works in us "both to will and to do" of your good pleasure! Yes, chasten and afflict me, Lord, if nothing else will serve to make me a partaker of your holiness!²

What a beautiful prayer! May we have the maturity to pray in a similar fashion as we seek to serve our great God with "joyful eagerness." I pray that this study of a remarkable woman will serve to convict us in areas where we lack that eagerness even as it encourages us to press on with

2. Susannah Spurgeon, *A Carillon of Bells*, (1896., repr., Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 2006), 43.

determination. May we trust the Lord in all things and look to Him with great expectancy.

Let's get started!