

Women We Should Know and Honor: Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon

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- [0:00] All right. Well, welcome, team. It's great to have you. This is what a fun inaugural experience.
- What a beautiful space. We're really grateful. I'm not quite sure how this is going to unfold. This is kind of experimental. The first service is going on. It usually goes on for about an hour or so.
- So I'm not going to speak at you for an hour. I promise you that. We'll just cover some material and then we can ask questions and then discuss some things.
- But if you need to get up, if you need to spread around, do whatever you need to do to stay comfortable. And remember, there's probably going to be another service after this, so I don't want to compromise that.
- So if you need to get up and you need to walk around, that won't bother me in the slightest. Do whatever you need to do to stay comfortable. And I thought we might begin by singing one of those hymns we've passed out.
- [1:11] Which one did we pick, Elizabeth? Come Thou Fount. Okay. Come Thou Fount. I think I know that one. Great. So, all right. Let's do that.
- Come Thou Fount of every blessing. Tune my heart to sing Thy grace.
- Streams of mercy never ceasing. Call for songs of loudest praise.
- Teach me some melodious sonnet. Sung by flaming tongues above.
- Praise the name I've fixed upon it. Name of the redeeming love.
- [2:12] The next one. Is there another verse? Yeah. I just don't know which one it is. God has blessed me. God has brought me to this place.
- And I know by Thy name. Me safely home by Thy good grace.
- Jesus sought me when a stranger. Wandering from the fold of God.
- He to rescue me from danger. Interposed His precious blood.
- O to grace. O to grace. O to grace. How great a debtor. Daily I'm constrained to be.
- [3:17] Let Thy goodness like a fetter. Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
- Prone to wander. Prone to wander. Prone to wander. Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.
- Here's my heart, Lord. Take and seal it. Seal it for Thy courts above.
- Love. Love. Wonderful. Thank you. Let's pray. Father, we are. We stand and wonder at the wonderful fount of blessing that you in your Trinitarian self are for your people.
- How you, Father, have loved us with an everlasting love. How you, Son, have purchased our redemption at the cost of your own blood.

[4 : 24] And how you, Spirit, have opened our eyes and convicted us of our need for a Savior. And then made that Savior, Christ, beautiful in our sight.

That we might rejoice in Him in that great salvation. So, Lord, we ask you by your Spirit to be present among us. And do that good work of a counselor.

Convicting us of where we need to change and come into conformity with Christ. And then working that very change in us by your good grace, Lord. So, thank you for this time and this opportunity and this wonderful facility that we have.

May it be used of you to exalt Christ in so many ways. That as He is lifted up, you would draw many to yourself. In Jesus' name we ask it.

Amen. All right, team. Well, we are starting a series on women.

[5 : 30] What kind of? Portraits from the family album of our family, the people of God. And in particular, we are going to look at some women. Women that we should know and honor.

And I'm going to try to draw some women that maybe, maybe some of you might not even have heard of. And hopefully bringing out their stories a little bit. The idea came to me while I was meditating on 1 Corinthians 12, not long ago.

Where Paul, you'll remember there, he talks about how we, as his people, are a body. And different ones function different ways, an eye, a nose, an ear, what have you. And he says, now in any typical culture, there are going to be some in the body who, in expressing their gifts and their talent and their roles, the culture is not going to quite look upon them with equal impressiveness or not valorize that particular thing.

And that's just kind of the way it is. In Corinth, for example, they thought that impressive were those that were able to use rhetoric and so forth and the others that had other gifts. Well, that wasn't all that impressive.

And Paul says, oh no, no, no, no, in the body of Christ, what we want to do is recognize the vital importance of every contribution.

[6 : 59] And if there's a cultural situation in which some aren't given as much honor or credit or appreciation, then what we want to do is we want to compensate with that as the people of God.

So looking back, oftentimes it seems as though the women in our midst, who God has greatly used, get somewhat short shrift in the annals of history and appreciation.

So we want to try to rectify that somewhat, if we can, in this series. So that's kind of the motivation of this. Plus, it's just fun. Everybody loves a good story. And I'm hoping that we've found some edifying ones.

So that's where we're headed. In this first profile, we've called the woman whose scarves were all over the land.

Or we might call it Selena's scattered scarves. So here we go. The historical context of our drama has been called the age of reason.

[8 : 08] An era enamored with the powers of the human mind to make its liberating way in the world.

Liberating above all from the hobbling shackles of revelation and tradition. So they said. But in this age, reason had its hearty twin, ridicule, which would probably be the greater menace to the faith.

The solvent of satire bit deeply at the very foundations of Christianity. And subjected to mockery were not only its tenets, but also its devotees and especially its leaders.

George Whitefield. There he is. George Whitefield was among them. The great preacher of awakening in a spiritually slumbering age.

Dramatic, even theatrical in his bearing, he was an easy target. Especially his crossed eyes.

[9:22] There he is. If you look closely, you'll notice that he had crossed eyes. People loved to make fun of him for that. Indeed, remorselessly, he was made the special subject of lampoon in a stage performance.

Doing uproarious rounds in the London theaters. Wounding to Whitefield and also bolstering the prejudice.

It really did seem a hindrance to the gospel. But inexplicably, at its height, the play, in mockery of Whitefield, suddenly stopped.

As it turned out, David Garrick, the far-famed and premier Shakespearean actor of his day, had exerted his singular influence in that thespian world to bring the production to a close.

This, not on his own initiative, but for a dear friend who had asked him to do so. Who could that have been? But more than mockery, George Whitefield and his gospel-preaching co-laborers had to struggle against a prideful prejudice ensconced in the very church from which they sprang.

[10:43] The Church of England... There we go. There's a better picture of Whitefield, I suppose.

There he is preaching. If it were a video, you'd see how dramatic and thespian he was. Vital Christianity was at low ebb.

And the typical Church of England vicar was more preoccupied with fox hunting than preaching. And that was probably a good thing, however, as the preaching done was so terrible, it was described as mere Mohammedanism, or Islam, without Mohammed.

Just awful, awful preaching. Morality and decorum was the weekly summons from the pulpit. And the notion...

Oh, thank you, that's a great idea. Yes. A little stifling in here. It's all the hot air that I... Morality and decorum was the weekly summons from the pulpit.

[11:48] And the notion of being born again, proclaimed as a necessity by George Whitefield and his compatriots, was thought extreme, indeed indecorous, and overzealous enthusiasm.

That's what this born-again stuff was called, damningly called. That's just enthusiasm. Indeed, a church bell was struck at the time, minted with this inscription, Hurrah for the Church of England, and down with enthusiasm.

Well, at first, the efforts of the Gospel Awakeners to rouse the somnolent churchgoers was politely ignored by the reigning clergy.

But as soon as the Awakening seemed to be making inroads in their parishes, those in power exerted legal force to restrict and muzzle the enthusiasts.

Venues were denied and meetings were broken up, while the magistrates would look on indifferently. But then, quite unexpectedly, the King of England himself interposed his royal will that such religious persecution desist in his realm.

[13:11] Ah, that's a... Yeah, that's helpful too, definitely. Definitely. It seems that someone had reached the King's ear and prompted his protective decree.

Well, as we shall discover, the very one who could move the levers of the London Theatre could also sway the royal court, and did not hesitate to do so for the sake of the Gospel.

And here she is. Whoops, there it is. No, no, go ahead.

Go ahead. Whatever you can do to help us out. Selina was born August 24th, 1707.

We're not quite sure where, as the family had several homes, but likely the imposing mansion at Staunton Herald, there it is, was...

- [14:18] That was the seat of the Shirley family, an illustrious family. Here, that's... Let me show you what it is today. There it is. You can see a little bit better. That's where she was born. Staunton Herald. They were an illustrious family, in whose blood that of emperors, kings, and queens mingled profusely. She was the second of three girls, and it would seem sheltered luxury would be her lot.
- But when she was nine years old, her eye was arrested by a funeral procession bearing a small coffin of a girl no older than she.
- Transfixed, she followed the cortege to the burial ground, and from that day would often visit the grave. It marked the beginning of a seriousness about life in the light of impending death.
- And this would mark her all of her days, that little experience as a nine-year-old girl. Knowing that frivolity was a dominating feature of much of the English aristocracy, and that she would marry within that society, young Selina often uttered the prayer that she would marry into a serious family.
- [15:53] And God granted this desire in husband Theophilus, the ninth Earl of Huntington, also, and in fact, even more so of a family of royal descent.
- Well, for all their seriousness, they seem to have had quite a happy time together. Here is their family. There is Selina. There's Theophilus.
- And there are two. There would be more children, but those were the ones that were alive when the painter painted this image of them. But marriage did not extinguish the serious streak which expressed itself in the young countess in a busyness in doing good, especially by way of benefactress to the poor.
- She was the frequent visitor to the cottages on her estate and never failed to meet any need with abundant charity. Her tenants came to refer to her as Lady Bountiful, and the sound of her approaching coach gathered a little posse of hopeful children for the handouts, whatever they would be.
- She became vastly admired for her reputation as a Christian lady, and that accompanied her in the high praise of her very high-born neighbors and peers.
- [17:18] Well, this proved gratifying to the countess, but somehow not satisfying. Looking back, she would later discern that, quote, I was going about to establish my own righteousness.
- She had the praise and applause of her peers, but what about God? What would win his favor? Anxiously, Selena redoubled her efforts, hoping she might feel satisfied, that God was satisfied.
- But this resting peace tantalizingly eluded her. Her health broke in the strain, indeed completely, to the point that she feared she was at death's door.
- Her illness had brought her benevolence to a halt, but with it, her sense of worthiness. Couldn't do any more good things, didn't feel worthy anymore.
- This compounded her terror. But in the gracious providence of God, her peaceless anguish perfectly prepared her to hear with wonder the ecstatic, breathless testimony of her sister-in-law, Margaret.
- [18:51] Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret.
- Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret. Margaret.
- But then, upon the ashes of these vain hopes, had set forth a perfect and availing righteousness of Christ for all and any who put their trust in him alone.

And Lady Margaret had ventured that trust. And the peace and joy that instantly flooded her heart was now radiant on her face.

Taking Christ, his perfect righteousness and forgiving blood, Selina, too, felt that same peace and joy distill into her troubled heart.

[20:12] And testimony to how the spiritual deeply affects the physical. She immediately gained back her bodily health.

Isn't that extraordinary? When having this spiritual peace, suddenly she's physically well, too. Well, the countess was now a Christian in a way never known or felt before.

And she could not suppress telling all who would listen of the source of her newfound joy. But such a message struck her church-going hears as utterly foreign or damningly bearing the taint of enthusiasm.

A bishop was immediately summoned to persuade her back from these religious wilds to the safe enclosure and sedate way of decency and decorum in religion.

But Selina had been pouring over her Bible and ably asserted before the bishop her newfound faith as none other than gospel truth.

[21:34] It was such a marvelous encounter. You know, the bishop's kind of sputtering and she's saying, Oh, but the Bible says, but the Bible tells us. Well, gospel or not, most of her aristocratic friends found the message impertinent.

Impertinent, that was their word. As the Duchess of Buckingham told her, I quote, It is monstrous to be told you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth.

This is highly offensive and insulting. And I cannot but wonder that your ladyship, she's speaking to the Countess of Huntington, that your ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with our high rank and our good breeding.

Sad to tell, despite all of these appeals over all the years from Selina, the Duchess would die contentedly confident with her aristocratic heart.

Alas, how common is Goethe's presumption that God would never damn a truly cultured person.

[23:09] It's not how it works. It was a tough mission, very tough mission field for the Countess. For so often, the high and mighty are the high and haughty.

Reflecting on God's grace in her own life. The Countess used to often say, Thank God for the M.

Thank God for the M. Referring to the Apostle's phrase in 1 Corinthians 1.26, where he says, Not many of noble birth.

Thank God for the M. Thank God it's not any. But not many meant at least some. And this was her circle and mission field now.

How might she reach them? If her high-born peers would not go to the gospel preachers, perhaps she could bring the gospel preachers to them.

[24:15] Thus began the Countess's drawing room outreach. It's marvelous. Having received a lovely embossed invitation to come to tea, the upper crust would gather in her well-appointed drawing room, and you saw the likes of her mansion.

I'm sure it was well-appointed. To her well-appointed drawing room, and while they consumed fine cakes, soon found themselves spellbound by George Whitefield, who came at her invitation, sometimes as often as twice a week.

And Whitefield was a consummate orator, and could transport an audience by his word dramas. Oh, there's Lord Chesterfield, as in the famous letters of Lord Chesterfield.

Yes, as once George Whitefield was, and they were so curious about him. They had heard things. So they were curious, so they liked to listen.

And once George Whitefield was comparing the case of a benighted sinner to that of a blind beggar with his kind of blind staff going forward and tottering on the brink of a precipice, and then his cane slips from his hand, but he grasps after it right in the back.

[25 : 49] And so Whitefield's describing that, and suddenly the suspense was pierced by a cry, leaping up, and no doubt spilling his tea as he leapt up.

Lord Chesterfield shrieked, good God, he's gone! Just having completely entered in, and then, oh, excuse me, sat down and then re-poured his tea. Stirred the tranquility of the moment.

So this is how mesmerizing Whitefield was. By all accounts, his preaching, utterly mesmerizing. Indeed, David Garrick, remember, he was, he's the premier, the leading Shakespearean actor of the day, to whom we've previously referred.

He was a regular at Selena's, at her drawing room, outreaches. And he, he marveled at how Whitefield intoned the word Mesopotamia and confessed, I would give a hundred guineas, that was a lot of money, a hundred guineas, if I could just say the word, oh, like Mr. Whitefield.

And he's the top Shakespearean actor of the day. Unbelievable, unbelievable. And for all of their gratified curiosity, they heard the gospel, clearly and vividly declared, heard the inner call, thank God for the M.

[27 : 23] Thank God. And with the drawing room full of lords and ladies, the countess did not forget the downstairs and would send Whitefield to repeat his servant, servant, sermon to the servants and the cooks downstairs so they would not be without the good news of Jesus Christ.

And what would it take for the common folk to hear the good news? The worker in the field, the miner in the pits, or the thatcher on the roof, who seemed eager to listen?

Well, John Wesley, Whitefield's friend and fellow awakener, did not think it possible that someone could be saved outside of a church building.

Remember, these were the days of kind of decorum in religion. But wherever he, John Wesley, would go, the buildings, and he was one of Whitefield, he was one of these awakening preachers, the buildings, the church buildings, were just too small to accommodate the eager hearers, and crowds would be turned away.

Here, yeah, there's, there's Wesley, John Wesley. I, my father had a huge print of this in his study, along with a study of, a print of Martin Luther studying the Bible.

[29 : 03] And so I grew up under the shadow of these things, you know, studying the Bible and preaching the good news. They're just, these images are so precious to me. If I could have gotten back to take a picture off the one in our house, this would be a better, a better image for you.

So, on, on one occasion, when John Wesley had been preaching in the church, the, the, the folk who couldn't press in for the, for the, for the lack of room, they lingered just outside the church, hoping to hear something through the open windows.

And as, and as John Wesley left, he, he saw the sad crowd still present to the churchyard.

So, wonderfully, he just stood upon a tombstone where he could project and he just repeated his whole sermon, preaching to them too, to their great joy and for many to their eternal benefit.

The fields were ripe for harvest, but the workers were few. Wesley, John Wesley, also thought that none but officially authorized clergy were fit to preach, so was vehemently against lay preaching.

[30 : 34] That is, you weren't allowed to preach the gospel at all unless you were an ordained minister who had had all this appropriate education, you know, training and education.

education. That was his belief. The problem was it was so hard to be able to get that education. Not many people could do it. It was a very, very narrow gate.

And Wesley firmly believed this. But, thanks be to God, two very persistent women finally persuaded John Wesley otherwise.

his mother, Susanna, an extraordinary woman. One day, I'm going to do a whole profile on her. Just extraordinary.

Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles, and the Countess of Huntington, Selina. An indomitable pair. And John Wesley finally agreed to go listen to a rather rough-around-the-edges lay preacher that the Countess had been encouraging.

[31 : 42] Well, he most definitely lacked the Oxford accent of John Wesley, but evidently not the Holy Spirit. And Wesley came away concluding, quote, it is the Lord.

Let him do what seemeth good to him. And from there and then, lay preachers augmented the preaching force and became really the hallmark of this growing movement of awakening.

What we in the American choice called the Great Awakening, the First Great Awakening. Thanks to those two women. Well, as the gospel sounded forth across Britain, from village cross, as we saw with Wesley, to country veil, thousands experienced new birth.

But what would become of them? There was a famine for the word of God in the churches. Wesley, John Wesley, a great organizer, developed classes, what he called classes.

These were really small groups for mutual encouragement. So the people that were converted in this open preaching, they gathered together in little small groups, because there wasn't much fair for them in the churches at the time.

[33 : 05] So they were in classes, meeting for mutual encouragement. Whitefield's converts, however, found no haven. They are, alas, said Whitefield, a rope of sand.

He was not a good organizer. Well, here, the countess stepped in. She had been gathering up preachers and deputizing them as her chaplains.

And it was not uncommon for aristocrats to engage a private chaplain. You know, they'd have their huge estate and they wouldn't want to go to church, so they'd just engage a chaplain and they would be their private family chaplain.

And they would be identified by wearing the scarf of what, you know, the lordship or the countess, whatever, who would sponsor them.

So that's how they would be identified. And they would enjoy the authorization to preach because they had the scarf, the embossed scarf. So what Selina did was she began to build chapels for her chaplains.

[34 : 26] And they began to dot the landscape. And there the new converts could go and be nurtured in the gospel. And she would fill their pulpits with her itinerant chaplains, moving them to and fro like a general commanding her troops.

Hence, it was said in either delight by the friends of the gospel or in dismay by others, her scarves are all over the land.

Or her scarves are all over the land. But more ministers were needed to save souls and to nurture converts.

And Oxford and Cambridge, the universities, the two universities, Oxford and Cambridge, were the only places where Anglican ministers could be trained. And they were stolidly against any enthusiasm.

Six students had just been expelled from Oxford and Oxford College for such leanings. As their tutor complained, they were quote, enthusiasts who talked of inspiration, regeneration, and drawing nigh to God.

[35 : 52] Oh my goodness. For such, one was persona non grata and kicked out of the university. So you had no opportunity for training.

Narrow was the gate. So, so the countess decided to found her own training college.

That very year, 1768, when the students were kicked out. Okay, on her birthday, Trevecca was established. And George Whitefield preached the inaugural sermon on the text, no one can lay any foundation other than Jesus Christ, 1 Corinthians 3.11.

Soon, it became a fountain of gospel witness flowing throughout the land and watering the very dry earth.

The countess herself would interview all candidates and direct them on their evangelical, evangelistic errands, providing ponies for their transport and a good suit and a wig if the setting demanded.

[37 : 02] So if she was going to bring them into her drawing room things, she'd give them a really nice suit and nice wig, you know, so it would be less offensive. Well, a good thing that she had money, you might say, to finance all of these ventures.

Yes, and here's the extraordinary thing. when it began to run low, she sold all of her jewels to the substantial sum of 698 pounds and 15 shillings.

That was an enormous, an enormous amount. important. Why, it's as if she must have thought her treasure was in heaven or something.

I don't know. I scarcely could forego pausing here and asking, I wonder what jewels we have that we might sell to put some more jewels in our Savior's crown.

God. Well, the scale of these gospel ventures, it has to be emphasized in order to be grasped.

[38 : 27] You can sit in the front row if you want. I won't hear the hissing as well unless you sit in the front row. That's right. The scale of these ventures has to be emphasized in order to be grasped.

Lady Huntington's chapels were springing up everywhere, reaching great numbers. On Trevecca anniversaries, also her birthday, you remember, so a two-fold special occasion, she would summon her chaplains and they would preach in succession, sometimes nine of them in an unbroken row, to as many as 20,000 hearers.

So we can't even conceive of people even being able to, crowds like that even being able to hear without amplification. But they could do this.

I mean, the people like George Whitefield could actually project his voice when he came to the colonies here and would preach in Philadelphia, say, people would gather on both sides of the Schuylkill River and they could hear him.

It was unbelievable. So, actually, if you were a preacher, actually developing a voice was one of the key and pivotal things to do. And if you read Charles Spurgeon's lectures to my students, he has a chapter on how to develop and take care of your voice because this was your instrument, it was absolutely critical.

[40 : 09] So, 20,000 people around. It was said that there were over 1,000 ponies seen in the surrounding fields of all these gatherings.

While the college was housed at Trevecca, 150 preachers were trained, ponied up and suited up. That training college would migrate twice, once to Chescent and then to Westminster College in Cambridge where it was my happy experience to reside for one year in my own training.

It was so much fun to be in that same spot. 200 new chapels were now opened. Such pervading witness was bound to stir opposition and it did.

how many of her own chapels and chaplains can one woman have? Even a countess. It's far too many scarves outside of her wardrobe, they said.

You guys missed that. If you would engage a chaplain, the aristocracy, in order to give them authority, you would give them one of your scarves that was embossed. That was their authority and she would have hundreds.

[41 : 29] Say that. Far too many scarves outside your wardrobe. Vickers, who felt the enthusiastical encroachment, took legal action against her in the church courts.

Not in my neighborhood, they thought. And the countess found herself in a legal pickle that threatened to halt, indeed pluck up, her gospel mission.

It was then that she was able to appeal through her privileged access as an aristocrat to King George himself who draped his cloak of protection around her.

But it involved a watershed for the countess and her movement. She might gain royal protection through the Toleration Act, allowing dissenters, legally, dissenters from the Anglican Church, to gather and to preach.

But to come under its sheltering canopy, she would have to declare her chapels dissenting houses of worship. So Selina became a reluctant separatist, forced out of the Church of England and her chapel network, as John Wesley and his followers would later become, much to their own frustration and reluctance, they were driven out of the Church of England.

[42 : 59] They became their own denomination. So they came to be called Countess Huntington Connection Chapels. This is in 1781. So the Countess of Huntington's Chapels was its own denomination.

Again, she didn't want to no longer be an Anglican, but they forced her out. It was the only way that she could have the freedom to establish these things. This is her Countess of Huntington Chapel in Bath, was one of the great spas for the aristocrats at that time, so she built a chapel there so they'd be able to come and hear the gospel.

A conflict was not simply with the Church of England, doctrinal divisions began to emerge even within the ranks of the awakening preachers.

A rift opened between Whitefield and Wesley, John Wesley, along Calvinist Arminian fault lines. Whitefield's followers became known as Calvinist Methodists, as differentiated from Wesleyan Methodists who followed John and Charles Wesley.

Now the Countess had studied convictions in the matter, aligning her with Whitefield, but she maintained a breadth of friendship across those theological lines.

[44 : 30] And it's noteworthy that her judgment was highly esteemed, resulting in her frequently being sought for advice even at cross-grained theological affinity.

So for example, John Wesley, more Arminian, would consult her often and did as to whether it be advisable to publish his journals.

And happily, he followed her advice. And we have them in print now. They're marvelous. Given an opportunity to preach at Oxford, John Wesley sent the countess the sermon that he had prepared to see if she thought it suitable for the weighty occasion.

she thought upon reading it, it utterly unsuitable and told him so, directing him more promisingly. So he scrapped it and wrote another.

The almost Christian was what he wrote, which has turned out to be one of his most blessed sermons of all of them. An incredible afterlife in this sermon in terms of its impact for the kingdom of God, the almost Christian, thanks to Selina, Countess of Huntington.

[45 : 45] Another of the great evangelists of the day, I just can't wait for him. Don't you just want to meet this person? It's just going to be so wonderful.

Another of the great evangelists of the day, William Romaine, sought her judgment on a work of controversy he was to send to the press. And she found a line in it that spoke uncharitably of another brother in the Lord, Isaac Watts, who we know from some of his hymns.

And Selina the Countess told him, take it out, take it out, which he did. Oh, here's Isaac Watts. You remember him.

I wonder how frequent and consequential was the Countess's hidden editorial hand for the church in her day.

And these are a lot of church leaders that often are in conflict, and it's like a lubricant in the way they interact, to the huge benefit and blessing for the harmony of the church in her day.

[47 : 12] I'm sure. I mean, how often has Anita saved me from what I have witlessly written that would surely have caused calamitous offense or abiding hurt?

how many teachers among us would come off far better in the stricter judgment that will be applied had we subjected our thought to the judgment of our very wise spouses first.

So, there's a free recommendation that saved my skin. Neither were the Countess's deeply trained theological instincts, merely helpfully directive and cautionary.

They were also instructive and clarifying. Like Priscilla, she was quite capable and ready to explain the way of the Lord more accurately to others.

She certainly helped Henry Venn. Here's Henry Venn. I took that picture in the rain. Yeah, it's something. She certainly helped Henry Venn to a fuller understanding of the gospel.

[48 : 29] Once hearing him preach, she found him unclear on the atonement, so wrote him a letter. Oh, my friend, we can make no atonement to a violated law.

we have no inward holiness of our own. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord our righteousness. Cling not to such beggarly elements, but look to him alone who hath wrought out a perfect righteousness for his people.

And this exhortation proved fruitful in Venn's heart. As George Whitefield wrote to the countess, quote, your exertions in bringing him to a clearer understanding of the everlasting gospel have indeed been greatly blessed of the Lord.

So, and he went on to be one of the great evangelical leaders of his day, and indeed his son and his grandson, and so on for a long time, the Venn family.

Well, there is, we must acknowledge, a rather prominent executive tone to the countess. After all, she was a countess.

[49 : 50] Perhaps this is the aristocrat in her manifesting. She certainly was confident that she knew what people needed to do and did not hesitate to tell them so.

A few, it seemed, resisted her. John Barrage, there he is, another great gospel preacher of the age.

Wonderful guy. I remember when I was at Cambridge, I had heard that he was evangelist all the way to his death and even after his death on his tombstone. So I rode my bike a long, long, long, long way just to see it and I found this tombstone.

Look at this friends, isn't this wonderful? Here lay the earthly remains of John Barrage, late vicar of Everton and an itinerant servant of Jesus Christ who loved his master and his work and after running on his errands many years was called up to wait on him above.

Reader, art thou born again? No salvation without a new birth. I was born in sin February 1716.

[51 : 11] Remained ignorant of my fallen state until 1750. Lived proudly on faith and works for salvation till 1754.

Admitted to Everton Vicarage 1755. Indeed was a preacher of the gospel at this church while he was living proudly on works and faith.

Fled to Jesus alone for refuge. 1756. Fell asleep in Christ. January 22nd, 1793.

Isn't that wonderful? An evangelist on his tomb. Reader, art thou born again? No salvation without a new birth. death. So, that's John Barrage.

He was, he was, he occasionally would deny her her wishes as she moved players around the Great Awakening chessboard.

[52 : 16] but he took no offense and admired her even in her sharp dealings as he once wrote to her, verily, you are a good piper but I know not how to dance.

I love your scorpion letters dearly, though they do take the flesh off my bones and I believe your glasses, countess, are better than mine but alas, I cannot see through your glasses.

She did have good glasses. She saw the big picture clearly but she was not infallible and made mistakes as she herself acknowledged and regretted.

Late in life she said, as Christians we wish to retract what a more deliberate consideration might have prevented. There's a good lesson here for those who are often right and think themselves always so.

Well, there's so much more to tell of the countess and her impact. Her practical knowledge of just what needed to be done was not restricted to the national scale but reached down also to the quotidian matters of life.

[53 : 49] There's Sally, Charles Wesley's wife, and on one occasion Sally, wife of Charles Wesley, was quite ill with smallpox and her husband, Charles Wesley, was away looking after his brother John, who was also unwell.

So when Selina arrived and discovered Sally in her plight, she immediately set things right. She summoned George Whitefield to fetch Charles and send him, Charles, back to his wife's side where he belonged and then had Whitefield stay and nurse John Wesley back to health.

All that was needed was a good traffic officer to direct things with whistle and gesture and the countess was just the one to supply it. Oh, that's Charles Wesley.

That's the husband that should have been with the wife who had smallpox. Okay. And here is the countess, a little bit older now than the first picture we showed.

we have mentioned Selina as exercising an impact on a national scale and technically the British Isles involved more than a single nation as the Welsh and the Scots and the Irish would be swift to insist.

[55 : 22] But her influence reached farther afield than even the British Isles. She donated liberally to the fledgling college of New Jersey, my alma mater.

There it is a long time ago, 1746, when it was just getting started as a training ground for gospel preachers similar to her own Trevecca.

So she took it under wing and was very generous with the Princeton Lions of Judah. They were called the Lions of Judah before they were called Princeton Tigers. I prefer the former.

she gave funds to the Native American Samson Ockham, there he is, who was soliciting funds for a mission school way out in the wilds of New Hampshire that got going in 1769.

There it is, way out of the boonies. now we call it Dartmouth College, but it started out as a mission outreach to Native Americans.

[56 : 35] And Selina Countess of Huntington, very generously endowed Dartmouth College also. She sponsored African American children in Whitfield's Georgia Orphanage, the Bethesda Orphanage there.

This is the orphanage in Georgia. Indeed, thinking hers, the best hands to leave it in, George Whitefield, who had established the orphanage, bequeathed it to the Countess when he died in her will, in his will.

So he knew he'd take good care of it, which she did. Neither was Whitefield alone in this instinct. many cottage dwellers on her estate who died, leaving young children, they would commit them to the Countess's care.

And she would always raise them and care for them. Her concern with Africans, so many in this day, the victims of the whores of the slave trade, extended beyond the Georgia Orphanage.

She dedicated special efforts to reach them with the gospel and saw much fruit. And of those converted, many would later sail back to Africa where repatriate, freed slaves, in Sierra Leone.

[58 : 05] And there's the first colony as they were reestablishing it. of the 2,000 Africans who made the journey back there to Sierra Leone in 1792, half of them had been part of the Countess of Huntington Connection chapels.

It had been ministered to through her half of that entire colony. But these were her final labors.

There she is. By 1790, the weight of years was beginning to tell. The Countess was no stranger to pain.

Her high station had been no shield to sorrow and suffering. She was widowed early, 39, and five of her six children pre-deceased her, some of them heartbreakingly young.

At the last, her condition was protractedly painful. But as John Wesley was fond of saying, our people die well. It's because of our gospel hope.

[59 : 21] It was so in Selina's case. All the little ruffles and difficulties which surround me, she said, and all the pains I am exercised with in this poor body, through mercy affect not the settled peace and joy of my soul.

All is well and well forever. Well, how do we sum up this extraordinary life? She was truly a valiant Azer warrior, the companion warrior, a Deborah who led many a barak into battle, a Huldah to whom many came to find out the word of God, a Lydia who opened her house for gospel witness, a Tabitha whose hand of compassion touched many and needy saint, a Phoebe generous benefactress to many, and a Priscilla able to instruct in the deep truths of the faith.

Looking at the tumultuousness of the times, the vast fields white for harvest, the fewness of the laborers, one zealous for the gospel, took up pen and wrote to the countess, quote, a leader is needed and this honor hath been put upon your ladyship by the great head of the church Christ.

Even so, such was the need of her day and is it any less or any other in our day?

I cannot help but wonder on whose shoulders her mantle might fall. for surely ours is not simply to admire but to imitate who among us is ready not merely to cherish her memory but to follow in her train.

[61 : 39] Thank you. Let's end there and let me open it up for any questions you might have. If you need to get up and stretch do that too first.

Yeah, Tom, where are we in terms of the sequence of the time? I think we can go for a little while longer. I think they'll be going for at least 15 more minutes probably.

Okay, all right. We can wrap up earlier but we can certainly go. Okay, this is kind of experimental friends because we're trying to figure out how to fit the new schedule of things.

Yeah. Yeah. Yes. Well, you know, it's a little bit tentative.

She witnessed to him a lot and it's very difficult. He was very sympathetic to her work. He seemed to really, really love her and but he kind of thought it was a little crazy.

[62 : 51] he was the one that when she really was converted and it seemed to the aristocrats that she had gone out to the wilds of religion this enthusiasm she was born again.

He was the one that said dear I'd like you to see this bishop who can maybe help you to find your way back to decorum in this. So it seems like for all his sympathy toward her and his affection toward her he never seemed to have gotten it sadly.

Though it's difficult because he doesn't write, you know, we have no journals so it's so hard to know what these aristocrats are feeling sometimes because they just didn't express very much.

So I don't know, I don't know. Yeah, yeah, yeah, Elizabeth. Can you talk a little bit more about what it meant to her or the movement to move out of the Church of England?

Yes, yes. So the, she was raised in the Church of England. The Church of England was very much that church in which all the aristocracy would have had their at least formal home whether or not they were very involved.

[64 : 22] So for her in order to keep her chapels going to become a dissenter that was in her day and among her peers that would have been like you know getting on the back of a motorcycle and riding off with a communist or something you know during the McCarthy era.

it's just oh my goodness you know these things are not done. So very very difficult emotionally socially she had great affection for the Church of England but when there was this conflict between what the Church of England was insisting upon and what she knew God was calling her to do in terms of continuing to be committed to the progress of the Gospel it's kind of like Peter and John with the Sanhedrin where they say all do respect and we have immense respect for you the Sanhedrin you tell us you answer this question do we follow man or do we follow God so that's so she had to break she had to break off yeah so it was very hard yeah yes yes yes

Right, right. There was a tiny enough position. There were people in there who also recognized the work of God. Right, right. Well, there were those who were genuinely born again, who were, so there came to be what was called the evangelical party.

They called it a party in the Church of England. And there were definitely some. And we're going to go on to talk about some women for whom that was the case.

But there were some that were able to continue to find their home in the Church of England. So, for example, John Newton, the hymn writer, Amazing Grace and that, he was in the Church of England and very faithful there.

[67 : 04] And he just took all the flack and the conflict and the internal abiding and people trying to limit his influence and just thought, nope, this is where I'm going to be faithful.

This is, in my mind, the best boat to fish from, so to speak. So there were many that were able to... William Wilberforce was another who stayed within the Church of England.

And it was just kind of the evangelical party within it. But as a whole, it was... These were not the best days of the Church of England.

They ended up reacting to what was a genuine work of God in the awakening. And when you define yourself in opposition to that, that just ends up being very unhelpful spiritually, it seems.

Yeah. Yeah. So I'd follow up, a very different question. Sure. So just as you spoke about her influence and all the things she did, it's the kind of influence that in some circles would be...

[68:12] People would look and say, well, women are not supposed to be able to X, Y, Z. Did she face that kind of opposition or that kind of questioning around her role in this church?

How did she navigate, especially some of the things that today we talk about in the world of women in the church, and the kind of authority she seems she met, and maybe it was just purely informal.

But I'm curious... Right, right. ...she faced some of these and how... Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Great question. Well, it's interesting. It was all entirely informal in the sense of unofficial.

There was no office that she held. So her vast influence was moral and personal. And by moral, I mean just by the sway of the strength of her personality.

I think it's also undeniable that within that society, if you were part of the aristocracy, people would listen and heed, and there was an expectation that you would be listened to.

[69:22] So kind of the social structure that was the context wherein she operated, if an aristocrat spoke, everybody would stop, be quiet, and listen.

I think it was also for these other ministers, I think that they saw her in a very maternal way.

She was a mother at Israel, and they seemed to all be very, very open to her influence, and manifestly benefited hugely from it and had a high regard for it.

So it all unflowed. It all flowed out unofficial or informally, it seemed.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. She sounded very much like a pro-hippical deaconess in the church, like unity, shop absorber, Yeah.

[70:29] Between the, you know, unity, five, six. Yes. Because a deaconess, is that a thing in the church? They had deacons.

Yes. Yes, they had deacons. Yeah. But I'm pretty sure that it was all male at that time. Yeah. Yeah, at that time it was all male.

Yeah. But you're right. That's a great, a good fit. Yes, she seemed to have these sorts of deaconal, just to have a sense of what's going to promote the health of the church, what's going to help to establish unity.

Those are many of her really strong instincts and gifts. That's right. Yeah. Well, you know, it's interesting to ask, as we, I love the way she thought, well, okay, what's my sphere?

Well, who are the people that I could reach? And maybe even uniquely, where am I well placed to reach these people? So she has, she has her like tea party outreaches, her drawing room outreaches that were so extraordinary.

[71:52] And I think that that might be a good thing for us to ponder. What is my sphere of influence that I might be able to sanctify for kingdom usefulness?

Because we all, we all have some sort of sphere of influence. No doubt a sphere in which our position in it is somewhat unique, perhaps.

And to begin to think, okay, if I'm singularly placed to reach within my sphere, how might I creatively do that? What are some of the challenges?

What are some of the obstacles to, to, to people hearing the gospel within my sphere? And how might I creatively think of, I might be able to overcome them? Because your instincts within your sphere are going to be the best in all likelihood.

You'll have a sense of how your peers think, feel, respond, react, what would be appropriate, what would be thought inappropriate. So you are perfectly suited to be the one to exercise that sort of wonderful gospel salt and light.

[73:10] So that's, that's maybe a question that we could each take and, and ponder as, as we go. Where, where do you place me? What, what sort of, yeah.

Yeah. And maybe there are those that we know for whom it would be hard for us to imagine at least their first or second or third step being to come into this church to hear the gospel.

How might we be able to get the gospel out to them? Yeah. In, in a context in which they would feel tremendously comfortable, where they're being served Earl Grey tea and crumpets or what have you.

So, yeah. Wonderful. Well, thank you. Oh, sorry, Elizabeth. Yeah, yeah. This has nothing to do with her, but I'm wondering where John Darby fit into this sort of thing against the Church of England and what that was about and when it was.

Yes, well, that's, that's. It's sort of the same thing. Yes, that's about a century later. And we'll be able, as we kind of move along through history, we'll come to some of the context and then we can probably deal with some of those things there.

[74:20] All right. Well, wonderful. Thank you, team. Well, next week, I think we will take up a woman by the name of, well, maybe I ought to just not tell you yet and let you find out.

Well, no, no, okay. You don't need to read all about her. You can discover about her. Hannah Moore. Hannah Moore. So, not as well known as she should be.

A woman of extraordinary impact in her day. And many of us are just not aware of that. So, thanks for coming along and we'll see you, we'll see you next week.

Lord willing. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.