1. Welcome to our church history lecture on Susanna Wesley.
2. *Pray*
3. Helpful resources
   1. Metaxas, Eric, *Seven Women and the Secret of Their Greatness*
   2. Newton, John, *Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism*

Susanna grew up in a Puritan home, and he traces this background through her walk with God, through the lives of John and Charles Wesley, and into Methodism.

* 1. I am very dependent on Wikipedia for my research into English church history

1. Significance  
   Before talking about the details of Susanna’s life and her place in history, I do want to briefly consider her significance, why we ought to be talking about her in a class on church history
   1. *Eric Metaxas summarizes this well:*  
      While writing my book about William Wilberforce, I first came to appreciate the historic and cultural earthquake known as the Wesleyan Revival. Most of the dramatic social advances of the nineteenth century—including all that Wilberforce and his friend Hannah More were able to accomplish—were a direct result of that unprecedented outpouring of faith. It can be said without exaggeration that John and Charles Wesley’s efforts—their evangelism and service to the poor, the disenfranchised, and the hopeless—changed the world. It can also be said without exaggeration that who these great men were and all they did in their lives had everything to do with the extraordinary woman who raised them. (Metaxas 31)
   2. Certainly for a class on *church* history this is why we are touching on Susanna.  
      And it also gives us an excuse to widen the lens briefly and look at the broader history of Jesus’s church in England.
   3. But beyond Susanna’s impact on church history, it is a blessing that we have this opportunity to consider her example. Susanna stands in the great cloud of witnesses; her example is an encouragement to our own perseverance in the faith.
   4. As we reflect on her example, please remember that a mother’s work—in fact, everyone’s work—is significant whether or not it seems to have turned the world upside down.
   5. God has called us to a faithfulness that is usually plodding and unglamorous. He *always* blesses faithfulness. Sometimes he blesses it in dramatic ways, but more often he blesses it in quiet ways.
   6. Consider the fact that the widow’s last farthing, offered to God, was received by Jesus and blessed by him, even though he considered the people she was giving it to to be robbers!
   7. How much more will *our work as parents* be received and blessed by God when we offer it to him in faith, even if we do not see immediate fruit and reward from it.
2. I’ll start off by sharing some of her basic biographical information
   1. Born January 20, 1669
   2. Father Dr. Samuel Annesley, a nonconformist Puritan–Presbyterian minister
   3. Mother Mary White, whose name only recently rediscovered
   4. Susanna was the tast of *25* children, 24 of which were borne by Mary!
   5. Married to Samuel Wesley, a minister of the Church of England, on November 11, 1688 at age 19
   6. Susanna and Samuel had nineteen children, ten of which survived infancy
   7. Died July 23, 1742, at the age of 73
   8. Samuel had died seven years earlier
3. Before we get into the details of Susanna’s life,  
   I want to take a bit of a side trip into English church history  
   This will help to set the context of what is going on in the Church of England before and during Susanna’s life
   1. Christianity believed to have entered Britain in the very first century
   2. As of the early 3rd century, Tertullian wrote that “the haunts of the Britons” were “subjugated to Christ.”
   3. In the 4th century, British bishops are known to have attended various church councils
   4. The heretic monk Pelagius is believed to have been British or Celtic, but he spent much of his life elsewhere: Rome, Carthage, Jerusalem, Egypt
   5. In the late 6th century, Augustine *of Canterbury*—not to be confused with Augustine of Hippo—established a mission to the Anglo–Saxons, many thousands of whom converted.
   6. England eventually came to have two archbishops, at Canterbury and York.
   7. Throughout the early middle ages, there were some differences and variations between Celtic, Welsh, and British strains of Christianity
      1. Much has been made of these differences at times
      2. However, none of them were ever out of fellowship with Rome, just less closely and actively connected to each other and to Rome.
      3. The differences between these regions were not so much over theology as they were over matters of local practice that had never spread beyond each region, such as unique rules for calculating the date of Easter.
      4. For this reason, modern scholars refer to Celtic Christianity in particular as “insular Christianity,” a case of distant cousins rather than different churches altogether.
   8. In the 14th century, John Wycliffe was a predecessor to the reformation
      1. He later came to be called the “morning star of the reformation.”
      2. Called for reformation of church in areas of abuse of wealth and power
   9. England’s great break with Rome come in the time of Henry VIII, between 1531–1534
      1. Primary issue *not* Protestant reformation but authority of Rome over English church.
      2. Primary instigation was Henry’s desire to annul his marriage with Catherine of Aragon, who had failed to produce a male heir and was eclipsed by Henry’s fascination with Anne Boleyn
      3. The Pope was reluctant to allow this annulment, not only as a matter of principle but also as part of a larger power struggle over the English church.
      4. The abuses and power of Rome were part of the puzzle here, and things might have come to a head at some point anyway
      5. But the primary issue was still Henry’s desires
      6. Protestantism came into the CoE afterwards, on the basis of various leaders and outside influences such as Luther’s writings
      7. Henry himself was a mixed bag reformation–wise; overall, he was generally *opposed* to Protestant sentiments, but from a political rather than theological perspective, fearing they would weaken his power
         1. Henry opposed Luther and Tyndale, and was opposed to the *general* availability of an English translation of the Bible
         2. Some reforms took place under his rule by various leaders such as Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Cranmer
         3. And in fact, the so–called “Great Bible,” a translation into English, was published in 1539, but for church use
         4. This translation was largely dependent on Tyndale’s work
   10. Henry’s son, Edward VI, was a Protestant and had a Protestant regent and advisors. Under his reign the church became more Protestant in character and liturgy.
   11. But after Edward, the Catholic “Bloody” Queen Mary reigned from 1553–1558
       1. During her reign the CoE was re–established as Roman Catholic
       2. Several hundred Protestants were executed under the Heresy Acts
   12. After Mary’s death, her sister Elizabeth I reigned from 1558–1603
       1. Elizabeth was a Protestant, and she severed ties with Rome again
       2. The so–called “Elizabethan settlement” built a somewhat conciliatory CoE that allowed room for views such as transubstantiation
       3. The church at this point accepted
          1. Middle of the road folks
          2. RCs who were willing to accept the split with Roman authority
          3. Puritans who participated in the church but also wanted to see the reform go farther
       4. It was very costly at this point to be non–conformist
          1. Ministers might be imprisoned
          2. You might be fined for failure to attend the CoE
   13. Taking a brief detour into Scotland, where the reformation proceeded along different lines. . .
       1. Scotland had maintained ties with the Catholic church even while Henry severed Britain’s ties
       2. However, there was a series of growing connections with Britain and also growing resentment towards French and Catholic influence.
       3. This made things ripe for a Protestant reformation in Scotland as well
       4. In Scotland, a Calvinist Presbyterianism developed and became established during the time of Elizabeth.
       5. John Knox was a principal leader in this.
   14. Back in England, Elizabeth was succeeded by James I
       1. James reigned from 1603–1625
       2. He is the James of the Authorized, or “King James,” Bible
   15. In the middle of that century we encounter the English Civil War, 1642–1651
       1. Primarily a power struggle between Parliament and Crown
       2. A secondary issue was relative unity or independence of England, Scotland and Ireland
       3. But the church was certainly affected by this
       4. Began during the reign of Charles I
          1. Favored a “high” and more ritual or formal Anglicanism
          2. Increased penalties for non–conformism
          3. Unrest between Scotland and England
          4. Growing tension between Parliament and King
          5. There were several periods of war during this time
          6. Power plays between Charles and Parliament and army and Parliament
          7. Charles was imprisoned during the middle of this period and eventually executed
       5. The civil war gave rise to the Commonwealth of England, overseen by *Oliver* Cromwell, the “Lord Protector,” from 1649–1660
          1. CoE remained established church
          2. Episcopal government was suppressed in favor of Puritan Presbyterianism
          3. This began to fall apart with the death of Cromwell and the leadership of his son Richard
       6. 2y after the death of Oliver Cromwell, Charles II was received from exile as king in 1660
          1. By this time England’s form of government had solidly shifted in a parliamentary direction
          2. Puritans disfavored and an Episcopal CoE re–established
          3. Charles suspected of Catholic sympathy and during his reign he did not always enjoy full support of people or Parliament
          4. Great Plague of London occurred during this time, 1665–1666
          5. However, this is just a part of the plague’s great reach.
          6. The plague was reported to have been “present somewhere in Europe in every year between 1346 and 1671.” [[Wikipedia: Black Death](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Death)]
       7. Charles’s brother James II succeeded to the throne.
          1. He enjoyed initial favor, but then growing disfavor and suspicion of his tendencies toward Catholicism
          2. Granted some relief to both Catholic and Protestant dissenters
       8. Because of dissatisfaction with him and with his Catholicism, William of Orange, husband of James’s daughter Mary
          1. Was invited by many Protestant nobles to invade
          2. This resulted in the “glorious revolution” of 1688
          3. James fled, was captured, allowed to escape to France
          4. Not everyone welcomed or recognized William as king,  
             and we will come back to this later
          5. On William’s death in 1702
             1. Throne passed to his daughter, Anne, and then
             2. To a German line of cousins beginning with George I
             3. Because this line was traced through Mary as well as William, there was not the controversy over their rule as there was with William
       9. Throughout this time, non–conformism to the CoE became increasingly accepted
          1. Early on, there were fines for non–attendance and imprisonment for preaching; consider John Bunyan, who was imprisoned several times
          2. Non–conformists, or dissenters, could not hold public office or receive university degrees until 1828
          3. Non–conformism is a very broad term; there were quite a variety of non–conformists. The list includes:
             1. Baptists

Congregational church government

Practiced believer’s baptism

* + - * 1. Congregationalists

Congregational form of church government

But unlike the baptists practiced infant baptism

If you’re familiar with Marilynne Robinson’s *Gilead* books, the pastor John Ames was this sort of a Calvinist congregationalist

* + - * 1. Puritans, some of whom remained within CoE but others separated
        2. Presbyterians, many of whom would also be called Puritan
        3. Roman Catholics
        4. Quakers, Unitarians
        5. Eventually Methodists

Primarily John Wesley, Susanna’s son

Also influenced by John’s brother Charles Wesley and by George Whitefield

John Wesley initially part of the CoE

Methodism later separated after Wesley’s death

* + - 1. Today often called *free churches*

1. Basic life history
   1. Susanna grew up in a non–conformist Puritan–Presbyterian home
      1. Dr. Annesley a Presbyterian minister during Commonwealth
      2. But he was actually critical of Cromwell and sympathetic towards kings
      3. Did not join the CoE when the Commonwealth ended, but ministered as a nonconformist Presbyterian
      4. Some amount of persecution but things generally grew easier
      5. By all accounts her father was a very humble, faithful, cheerful, and unperturbable man, and their household a happy and joyful one.
      6. Thus we see a picture of Puritans, early ones at least, as filling out *all* the fruits of the Spirit and not just faithfulness and self–control. I’ll touch more on this later.
      7. He had a large and broad library, and is to credit for Susanna’s being a very capable writer, thinker, and student of theology.
      8. He was a very earnest minister, serious about ministry to people’s salvation and souls both within and outside the pulpit.
      9. He was equally concerned both for conversion and also for lives of obedience and holiness.
      10. Here already we see the clear beginnings of an evangelical zeal that is later inherited by John and Charles.
   2. Susanna joined CoE at age 13
      1. Apparently well thought out, but her reasons are lost to us by one of her house fires
      2. Appears to have been a “preference” and not a rebellion against or rejection of Puritanism
      3. Around this time a number of dissenters were rejoining CoE; there seemed to be a warming of sympathies on both sides
      4. Her father did not appear in any way to rebuke her for this, but rather there was continued great affection between the two of them
   3. Samuel Wesley
      1. Susanna met Samuel Wesley at the age of 12 at her sister Elizabeth’s wedding. He was 19 at the time.
      2. Samuel studying at this time to become a dissenting minister, but soon made the leap to the CoE
      3. Through their correspondence, Samuel helped to steer Susanna away from the error of Unitarianism and back to orthodox Trinitarianism.
      4. As their relationship developed, they carried on much of their courtship through letters.
      5. Samuel became an Anglican deacon in 1688, and they married on November 11 of the same year, seven years after first meeting. She was 19, he 26.
      6. The following year he was ordained a priest.
      7. Some similarities between the two of them
         1. Dissenters become Anglican
         2. Earnest about their Christian faith
      8. But many differences
         1. Susanna, while very spiritual, also very practical  
            Samuel very scholarly but inept with money and practical matters
         2. Susanna strong personality but also restrained and self controlled.  
            Samuel a bit vain and more volatile temperament.
         3. Samuel thought of himself as a writer and a poet, but critics regard his skills as moderate.
         4. Nevertheless he had some potential as scholar and churchman.  
            He was a very capable and caring preacher and minister.  
            In fact, even when relegated to debtor’s prison at one point, he carried on a cheerful ministry among the prisoners.
         5. In spite of this, he was relegated to what Susanna called “an obscure corner of the country” for his entire career.
         6. Some opportunity to participate in church affairs in London, but this only added to his financial burdens.
         7. In spite of his being a bit impetuous, or perhaps because of it, he seems to have had a generally joyful outlook on life, even in the face of hardship.
   4. Debt and suffering
      1. However, Samuel’s income and irresponsibility with money left the family poor and perpetually in debt.
      2. This placed an extra burden on Susanna of managing a household in the face of this debt.
      3. She herself frequently experienced some kind of physical sickness or weakness, and also frequent pain. It is unclear what the nature of this was; probably stress and an impoverished diet contributed to this
   5. Separation
      1. On top of the hardships of poverty and debt, Susanna’s and Samuel’s differences led to difficulties in their marriage.
      2. Susanna wrote later in life to her son John that “‘tis an unhappiness almost peculiar to our family, that your father and I seldom think alike.”
      3. Combining this with his impetuous spirit and temper, these disagreements created real difficulty at times.
      4. One of the sharpest points of disagreement between them was over the legitimacy of William of Orange as king of England.
      5. Early in 1702, after Susanna refused to say “amen” to one of Samuel’s prayers for the king, Samuel made a rash vow to remain separate from her until she begged forgiveness for her refusal. He left shortly for London and they remained separated for several months.
      6. He was eventually persuaded to give up his vow by a fellow minister.
      7. In spite of these differences and difficulties they seem to have been able to maintain an affection for one another. This affection is visible in both of their writings and in how deeply Susanna was later affected when Samuel died (seven years before her own death).
   6. But that is not all their difficulties!  
      Very shortly after Samuel returned home from his rash vow,  
      Their house burned for the first time
   7. During all their marriage,  
      Susanna was responsible for the management of the household and generally for the education of their children
      1. Nineteen children, ten of which survived infancy
      2. She once, when asked if she ever really wanted bread, replied that “strictly speaking, I never did want bread. But then, I had so much care to get it before it was eat, and to pay for it after, as has often made it very unpleasant to me. And I think to have bread on such terms is the next degree of wretchedness to having none at all!” (Newton 98)
      3. At one point, Samuel had fallen out of favor with their town for political reasons. The Wesley family was harassed by town folk, including killing of their livestock and threats of harm against the children. Samuel was thrown into debtor’s prison at this time by those who were opposed to him.
      4. He later came back into favor with the town.
      5. This was partly because Susanna had carried on a practice of reading her father’s and husband’s old sermons aloud on Sunday afternoons at home, because the substitute preacher was doing a terrible job. Her readings grew to draw quite a crowd from the church. Samuel was initially angered by her doing this but came to appreciate it.
      6. The family experienced a second devastating house fire in 1709. Little John Wesley was barely saved, and many of Susanna’s earlier writings are lost to this fire.
      7. During the winter of 1715–1716, the Wesley family experienced some kind of spiritual–demonic attack. There were many frightening evening and night–time noises and movements, experienced by all members of the family. The family did not leave the house, and it eventually came to an abrupt end for no apparent reason.
      8. Samuel continued to mismanage money as the children were growing and grown. He was even given a chance to manage his brother in law’s business, and fared poorly at this too.
   8. Personal piety
      1. Let’s talk a bit about Susanna’s spiritual life.
      2. She maintained a habit of morning and evening Bible reading, prayer, and journaling.
      3. She is well known to have lifted her apron over her head for mid–day prayer as a signal to her children that she was not to be disturbed
      4. She seems to have been a sensitive soul, but also a strong one
         1. Constantly searching and examining herself for sin to be mortified, such as covetousness and anxiety
         2. But also constantly looking to God for help and assurance and really finding comfort
         3. She seems not to have allowed herself to become distracted by temptations such as self–righteousness or self–pity, but to have always looked upwards, from her reflections and concerns and struggles to God.
         4. She was serious about not only pursuing God and placing him foremost in her thoughts, but also about finding delight and joy in him.
      5. Prayer and meditation really seem to have been a great source of strength and steadiness for her in the midst of hard work and difficulties
      6. The theological range in her meditation is very broad; she was truly interested in knowing who God is and how he works in his world. Newton says that her mediations range across “the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Trinity, . . . the mystery of divine providence . . . the creed . . . the Crucifixion,” (153).
      7. She made much of the Holy Spirit’s work in conversion and in ongoing help to us as believers.
      8. She recognized that the battle against sin was a battle not only of the mind but also of the heart’s affections.
      9. All of this regularly led to praise and adoration on her part towards God.
      10. Though an Anglican, she seems very much a joyful Puritan in the tradition of people like Jonathan Edwards.
      11. *As an example of her reflections, consider this morning mediation:*  
          [Reflecting on what we can know about God in creation] is to know God, as a man, as a reasonable creature: but this is not that knowledge that leadeth us to eternal life. That is a knowledge of another kind: the one we attain in a scientifical method, by a long train of arguments . . .; the other, by frequent and fervent application to God in prayer. The one is an effect of human reason assisted by human learning, . . . . The other is reason acting by the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit; God known to the heart, the will and its affections, not merely as the author of our being, but as he is exhibited to us under the character of a healer, a repairer of the lapse and misery of human nature, a Saviour, him whom our soul loveth. (Newton 155)
   9. Parenting and education
      1. Susanna is probably best known for her example in training and educating her children.
      2. People’s opinions on her “method” differ widely, I will offer some of my own reflections later.
      3. Her chief goal in education was very deliberately the children’s salvation and spiritual growth.
      4. She in fact wrote some of her own theological training materials on topics like the ten commandments and apostles’ creed after failing to find good educational materials at hand.
      5. She taught her children in one room of the house, six days a week.
      6. They began each day by singing a Psalm and reading the Bible, then spent three hours each morning and each afternoon in studies.
      7. She enlisted the assistance of older children in teaching younger children.
      8. While her children schooled, she sewed, managed accounts, wrote letters, and nursed.
      9. For many years had a practice of meeting with each child individually at a certain time each week, seeking to address their individual needs.
      10. In the evenings, the family would play games, sing Psalms, and read books.
      11. Samuel taught the boys Greek, Latin, and classical literature.
   10. As her children left the house, she corresponded extensively with them throughout their higher education and adulthood.
       1. Her extensive correspondence with John, Charles and Samuel in particular is how we know much about her.
       2. They maintained a close and warm relationship with her and sought her wisdom often.
       3. Clearly the course and shape of Methodism was strongly shaped by John and Charles’ upbringing by Susanna. She is widely regarded as the “mother of Methodism” for this reason.
       4. Some of the Wesley children had happy marriages and did well; others did not. In some cases this was the children’s own fault, in some cases Samuel was unwise and obstinate in what he allowed or insisted upon for his daughters’ marriages. John had a difficult marriage to a widow, Mary Vazeille. They were married a decade after his mother’s death, and the marriage ended in a bitter separation.
   11. The last five or so years of Susanna’s life coincided with the beginnings of the Methodist revival
       1. Susanna remained in very close contact with her sons John and Charles, and eventually came to live with John
       2. There was back and forth between them at this time to try to understand and define what was going on.
       3. It is interesting that John and especially Charles both claim to have been spiritually cold before this time in their lives
       4. Susanna’s training clearly presented the gospel and the need for lively faith and trust in Jesus to her children
       5. She chides them a bit for their interpreting variations in their feelings of zeal and assurance as variations in their actual salvation
       6. Charles especially at several times felt that after having come to a deep experience of faith or assurance that he was never really saved until that point; or during a spiritually dry season that he was no longer saved
       7. Susanna herself had at one point late in her life her own experience of a very strong comfort and assurance during the partaking of communion. Charles very typically exaggerated this event in one of his many hymns by suggesting that Susanna had spent the previous seventy years in bondage to legalism. But it is clear from her meditations that she really did anchor her assurance in Jesus rather than in her experience or feeling of assurance.
       8. In spite of these concerns, she was overall very supportive of the revival.
       9. Methodism represented a twin focus on personal trust in Jesus and also pursuit of personal holiness.
       10. Interestingly, at this time, she is believed to have authored a lively anonymous defense that appeared, arguing for John’s and Charles’s Arminianism over against George Whitefield’s Calvinism.
   12. Finally, just as with the rest of her life, she remained calm and peaceful in her approaching death. She died peacefully surrounded by several of her children.
2. At this point I’d like to let Susanna speak for herself by reading several quotations. Most of these are from her correspondence with her sons; I’ve focused on her philosophy on parenting and education, but we could easily spend much more time looking at her devotional life.
   1. *First, a quote conveying her sense of the weight of responsibility of parenting*  
      [I] consider ‘tis no small honour to be entrusted with the care of so many souls . . . [I]t will be certainly no little accession to the future glory to stand forth at the last day and say, “Lord, here are the children which Thou hast given me, of whom I have lost none by my ill example, nor by neglecting to instill in their minds, in their early years, the principles of Thy true religion and virtue!” (Metaxas 38)
   2. *Some thoughts from her on parenting little children*  
      [To John] Dear Son, according to your desire, I have collected the principal rules I observed in educating my family. The children were always put into a regular method of living, in such things as they were capable of, from their birth; as in dressing and undressing, changing their linen, &c. The first quarter commonly passes in sleep. After that, they were, if possible, laid into their cradle awake, and rocked to sleep; and so they were kept rocking till it was time for them to awake. This was done to bring them to a regular course of sleeping, which at first was three hours in the morning, and three in the afternoon; afterwards two hours, till they needed none at all. When turned a year old (and some before), they were taught to fear the rod, and to cry softly, by which means they escaped abundance of correction which they might otherwise have had; and that most odious noise of the crying of children was rarely heard in the house, but the family usually lived in as much quietness as if there had not been a child among them. (Newton 108)
   3. *Some thoughts from her on parenting children of all ages*  
      [To John] There were several bye-laws observed among us. I mention them here because I think them useful.
      1. It had been observed that cowardice and fear of punishment often lead children into lying; till they get a custom of it which they cannot leave. To prevent this, a law was made that whoever was charged with a fault, of which they were guilty, if they would ingenuously confess it, and promise to amend, should not be beaten . . .
      2. That no sinful action, as lying, pilfering at Church or on the Lord’s-day, disobedience, quarrelling, &c., should ever pass unpunished.
      3. That no child should ever be chid or beat twice for the same fault; and that, if they amended, they should never be upbraided with it afterwards.
      4. That every signal act of obedience, especially when it crossed upon their own inclinations, should be always commended, and frequently rewarded, according to the merits of the case.
      5. That if ever any child performed an act of obedience, or did any thing with an intention to please, though the performance was not well, yet the obedience and intention should be kindly accepted, and the child with sweetness directed how to do better for the future.
      6. That propriety be inviolably preserved; and none suffered to invade the property of another in the smallest matter, though it were but of the value of a farthing, or a pin; which they might not take from the owner without, much less against, his consent. This rule can never be too much inculcated on the minds of children; and from the want of parents or governors doing it as they ought, proceeds that shameful neglect of justice which we may observe in the world.
      7. That promises be strictly observed; and a gift once bestowed, and so the right passed away from the donor, be not resumed, but left to the disposal of him to whom it was given; unless it were conditional, and the condition of the obligation not performed.
      8. That no girl be taught to work till she can read very well; and then that she be kept to her work with the same application, and for the same time, that she was held to in reading. This rule also is much to be observed; for the putting children to learn sewing before they can read perfectly is the very reason why so few women can read fit to be heard, and never to be well understood. (Newton 112-113)
   4. *Her advice to her children on recreation*  
      [To Samuel] I do not know what time is assigned to you for [recreation], and I think your health and studies require that you should use a pretty deal of exercise. You know whether your heart be too much set upon it. If it be, I will tell you what rule I observed in the same case when I was young and too much addicted to childish diversions, which was this: never to spend more time in any matter of mere recreation in one day than I spent in private religious duties. I leave it to your consideration whether this is practicable by you or not. I think it is. (Newton 55)
   5. *She is sometimes criticized for her strict discipline, especially her philosophy of conquering a child’s will. Here is an example from a letter to her son John*  
      [In a letter to John] In order to form the minds of children, the first thing to be done is to conquer their will, and bring them to an obedient temper. To inform the understanding is a work of time; and must with children proceed by slow degrees, as they are able to bear it; but the subjecting the will is a thing which must be done at once, and the sooner the better; for by neglecting timely correction, they will contract a stubbornness and obstinacy which are hardly ever after conquered, and never without using such severity as would be as painful to me as to the child. (Newton 113)
   6. **OPTIONAL***But she makes clear that her aim is not the subjection of the child’s will to her own, but rather to God. Both parent and child must submit their will to God:*  
      [To whom unknown] In the esteem of the world, they pass for kind and indulgent, whom I call cruel parents; who permit their children to get habits which they know must be afterwards broken. Nay, some are so stupidly fond, as in sport to teach their children to do things, which in a while after they have severely beaten them for doing. When a child is corrected it must be conquered, and this will be no hard matter to do, if it be not grown headstrong by too much indulgence. And when the will of a child is totally subdued, and it is brought to revere and stand in awe of the parents, then a great many childish follies and inadvertences may be passed by. Some should be overlooked and taken no notice of, and others mildly reproved; but no willful transgression ought ever to be forgiven children, without chastisement, less or more, as the nature and circumstances of the offence may require. I insist upon conquering the will of children betimes, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual. But when this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by the reason and piety of its parents, till its own understanding comes to maturity, and the principles of religion have taken root in the mind. (Newton 114)
   7. *Later she says this even more forcefully:*  
      [Same document] I cannot yet dismiss this subject. As self-will is the root of all sin and misery, so whatever cherishes this in children insures their after wretchedness and irreligion; whatever checks and mortifies it promotes their future happiness and piety. This is still more evident if we farther consider that religion is nothing else than the doing the *will of God*, and not our own; that the one grand impediment to our temporal and eternal happiness being this *self-will*, no indulgences of it can be trivial, no denial unprofitable. Heaven or hell depends on this alone. So that the parent who studies to subdue it in his child, works together with God in the renewing and saving a soul. The parent who indulges it does the devil’s work; makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable, and does all that in him lies to damn his child soul and body, for ever. (Newton 116)
3. Reflections  
   Before we close I’d like to offer a few reflections on Susanna’s life and legacy
   1. Her life was difficult
      1. We instinctively reach to compare against our own lives
      2. Perhaps this is encouraging or discouraging to you
      3. Comparison can be helpful in some ways, but everyone’s life is different and everyone’s life is difficult in its own way
      4. If we think to Hebrews 11, what we are primarily to do with her example is to be *spurred on* to similar faith and obedience
   2. There is much that is worthy of imitation in Susanna’s life  
      I want to call your attention to five things in particular:
      1. First: the importance of drawing strength and sustenance from God in prayer
         1. Susanna’s chief source of strength and hope and joy was her pursuit of God in reading Scripture, meditating, and praying.
         2. Two to three daily and significant visits with God in prayer is by itself an impressive example, even considered apart from how she redeemed the rest of her time.
         3. But this time with God really is the great secret to how she was able to accomplish so much in the face of so much difficulty
         4. Perhaps you have had the experience of dealing with a rechargeable battery that does not hold much charge any more. The leaf blower or cordless drill works well for only a minute. But even the most expired rechargeable battery can still accomplish something if it goes back to the charger again and again and again.
         5. We need to follow Susanna’s example and continually cast our cares on Jesus. Psalm 55:22, “Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.”
         6. If you are anxious or overwhelmed, the biggest and first part of how you deal with it is by bringing your cares to the one who is never anxious or overwhelmed.
      2. The importance of both resting in our salvation and also running that we may obtain the prize
         1. Susanna’s life was fantastically fruitful
         2. As much as she was committed to hard and faithful work, and to mortifying sin in her life, she seems not to have tied her confidence and assurance and joy to this work
         3. She seems really to have sought hard to find her joy and delight in God himself and in her salvation, and to have toiled *in light of* this rather than to secure this
         4. For us too this is the right and happiest and healthiest place to be
            1. First, Jesus is our vision and our joy and delight
            2. But then, whatever the work set before us or the battle against sin, we work hard with all our might, grounded on this joy
         5. Susanna stands as an example to us of avoiding a variety of pitfalls:
            1. Self–righteousness in accomplishments and work
            2. Self–loathing or pity as we reckon with our sins
            3. Allowing confidence in our salvation to grow into spiritual complacency
      3. The importance of pursuing *all* of the fruits of the Spirit, in our own lives and in our parenting
         1. The prevailing wind in our culture today is that children must be set on a path of seeking happiness and self–expression
         2. Our culture looks on the self–disciplined life that Susanna set out for her children very critically. How can a child discover herself and flourish under such harsh restraints on their freedom?
         3. However, Susanna seems to have steered a path that sought to cultivate *both* joy *and* self–control in her children.
         4. Likewise, we want our children (and ourselves!) to grow in *all* of the fruits of the Spirit.
         5. We do not have to choose between fruits of the Spirit.
         6. So, we want a joyful self–control
            1. We need to remember that joy is the best foundation for self–discipline and obedience; it was for the *joy* set before Jesus that he was able to endure the cross
            2. As we know from Ecclesiastes, God–given joy is really the key that unlocks life.
            3. Our own king is not uptight or anxious as he governs his world. He *laughs*.
         7. But we also need a self–controlled joy and creative expressiveness
            1. Self–governance is actually key to the most glorious and powerful expressions of creativity
            2. Think of the ballerina and the concert pianist and the classical painter, of the countless hours that they have invested in their discipline.
            3. If we and our children want to accomplish great things for God, we do well to remember that God’s own evaluation, as he says in Proverbs 16:32, is that “he who rules his spirit [is better] than he who takes a city.”
            4. David’s son Adonijah and Eli’s sons Hophni and Phinehas stand as the great biblical examples of the outcome of not “displeasing” and “restraining” our children or ourselves.
      4. The importance of earnestly investing in our children’s spiritual growth
         1. Both Susanna and Samuel leave a good example for us here
         2. We cannot of course secure or earn our children’s salvation
         3. But we can fan the flames over and over and over again
         4. And we can also work to set an example for them of heartfelt pursuit of God
         5. And this great responsibility applies to us regardless of what form of education we have chosen for our children
      5. The importance of not despising small beginnings in our children’s lives
         1. I think Susanna was right to criticize John and especially Charles for making a great deal of their supposed adult “conversion” experiences.
         2. Every new work of God in our lives, to open our eyes more to our sin and to his goodness in the gospel, does not mean that what came before was not also the work of the Holy Spirit.
         3. We should expect that this will happen, that God will give us deeper understanding and greater assurance again and again.
         4. The gospel does not require us to reach a certain depth of knowledge or emotion before Jesus will accept us.
         5. It only requires us to trust in him with a childlike faith.
         6. I pray that most of our children will testify that they cannot recall a time when they did not love Jesus, and that they are glad he kept opening their eyes more and more to his gospel throughout their life.
4. Conclusion
   1. This concludes my overview of Susanna’s life and reflections on her example to us.
   2. I hope you are encouraged by her example much like the cloud of witnesses from Hebrews 11.
   3. Now I’d like to open the floor to your questions and your own reflections.
   4. Thank you!