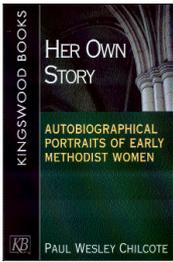


Methodist Women Tell Their Stories



Reading *Her Own Story* is like looking through an ancient, rusty trunk in your great-grandmother's attic and finding, hidden under yellowing linens and fading daguerreotypes, the journals of a forgotten female relative. The journals make this unheard-of kinswoman come to life in such a way that you feel you know her intimately. She writes of her spiritual journey in all of its joy, splendor, pain, and frustration. Reading these newfound journals is like sitting at the feet of a wise female mentor, listening to her tell her life stories and the spiritual lessons she has learned from them.

Now, expand the above scenario to include the journals, diaries, letters, and autobiographies of more than twenty women and you have *Her Own Story*. Paul Wesley Chilcote has been searching through many "attics," and he has found a treasure trove of autobiographical literature written by Methodist women who lived from the early 1700s to the middle 1800s. Chilcote gives informative introductions to each woman's writings, placing her in her historical context. There is an interesting, and sad, progression from the time when John Wesley ponders whether to allow female preachers, to his wholehearted support of them, to the time after his death when new, male leadership all but prohibits women preachers.

The depth of spiritual maturity, the intense desire to love and serve God, the joy of bringing multitudes to saving faith in Jesus by preaching and teaching, and the pain of being condemned by some of their male counterparts for boldly proclaiming the Word all come alive in the pages of this book. Listen to Sarah Colston, an active member of the Methodist Societies in Bristol, England, as she asks Charles Wesley to pray for her spiritual growth and service: "Dear Sir, pray for me that I may be faithful to improve my glorious talents every moment of my life and never rest till I am pure in heart" (p. 45).

Hear Englishwoman Dorothy Ripley's determination to make a difference for God in the lives of American slaves: "I am a free woman by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ who sends me where and when he pleases and who

has sent me here at this time to baptize my soul for the dead, . . . and to groan in secret for the poor Africans for whom my spirit is pressed this day . . ." (p. 144). Dorothy's groaning "in secret" became very public when she met with President Thomas Jefferson in 1802 to plead the cause of the enslaved Africans, and in 1806 addressed Congress, urging the members to abolish slavery.

Share the pain of Mary Barritt Taft, "unquestionably the most famous female evangelist of the early nineteenth century" (p. 153), as she recounts her treatment by fellow believers: "This has frequently been my greatest grief[,] for all that I have suffered from the world in the way of reproach and slander is little in comparison with what I have suffered from some professors of religion as well as even ministers of the gospel. To their own Master I leave them. . . . In the midst of all, God hath given me his approving smile and a blessed consciousness that I was acting under his divine sanction and influence and with purity of intention, designing *only* to promote his glory among men and the real good of my fellow-creatures" (p. 155).

Share also Mary Taft's hope for a better future for women called by God to proclaim his Word: "God has in all ages of the church called a few of his handmaids to eminent publicity and usefulness, and when the residue of the SPIRIT is poured out and the mellinism [sic] glory ushered in, the prophesy [sic] of Joel ii. 28, 29 being fully accomplished in all its glory, then probably, there will be such a sweet blending into one spirit—the spirit of *faith*, of *love*, and of a *sound mind*—such a *willingness* to receive profit by *any* instrument, such a spirit of *humility*—in honor preferring one another that the *wonder* will *then* be that the exertions of pious *females* to bring souls to Christ should ever have been *opposed* or *obstructed*. May the Lord hasten the time!" (p. 162).

Are you a woman convinced that God has called you to preach but encountering resistance from men or your denomination who believe women preachers are unscriptural? Read *Her Own Story* and take heart that God has accomplished much through women for generations despite this attitude. Have you ever longed for a female mentor who has followed the call of God on her life in spite of opposition? Read *Her Own Story* and find a host of mentors. Are you a man who is diligently trying to understand what your Christian sisters are experiencing in their efforts to be all God has created them to be? *Her Own Story* will give you insight.

Paul Chilcote has given us a wonderful gift by uncovering and compiling the writings of these spiritual kinswomen from early Methodism. They add to the rich, but small, heritage of extant writings by godly women throughout the history of Christianity. May reading them cause us to join Mary Taft in entreating the Lord to indeed hasten the time when "the *wonder* will *then* be that the exertions of pious *females* to bring souls to Christ should ever have been *opposed* or *obstructed*."

Reviewed by Ruby Renz, who is pastor of assimilation at Grace Fellowship United Methodist Church, Katy, Texas.

**Her Own Story:
Autobiographical Portraits of Early
Methodist Women**
by Paul Wesley Chilcote
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