

Vic's Pics

BOOKS EVERY METHODIST PREACHER SHOULD OWN

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PART VII

WESLEY'S VETERANS

The stories of Old Testament saints and sinners were written for our example (2 Corinthians 10:6). It is encouraging to watch God's providence at work in the unfolding of a good biography. In *The Tapestry* Edith Schaeffer wrote, "The thing that fascinates me really is the weaving of lives together, the fabulous way God works in history, while at the same time people's choices change history, for good or bad."

In 1779 John Wesley requested that each of the itinerant Methodist preachers write an "account of the more remarkable circumstances of his life." Most of the autobiographies were printed in *The Arminian Magazine*. Then in 1837-1838 Thomas Jackson collected thirty-six of them into

three volumes entitled, *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*. This collection went through three editions and then was reprinted in 1914 as *Wesley's Veterans*. In 1976 Schmul Publishers reprinted them once more and the seven volume set is available through Foundry Press for \$41.93.

Wesley found working men who had spiritual gifts and an eagerness to serve and put them to work for the kingdom of God, giving them significant responsibilities and leadership. Abel Stevens wrote,

The itinerants were taught to manage difficulties in the societies, to face mobs, to brave any weather, to subsist without means, except such as might casually occur on their routes, to rise at four and preach at five o'clock, to scatter books and tracts, to live by rule, and to die without fear.

The longest autobiographies are those of John Nelson and Thomas Walsh. Both run almost 200 pages, while the two shortest sketches run only eight pages. The average length is almost fifty pages. The beauty of

such a collection is the variety of men God used and the variety of their experiences. Each testimony is unique. It would be impossible to decide which experience to seek after. Instead, you begin to see the richness of God's grace. Many were saved from deep sin and were ignorant of spiritual matters. Other men had a good education and an early exposure to religion. They spoke honestly about their temptations and spiritual struggles. Their conversions were not superficial. Many also gave their testimony to entire sanctification as well.

Some of these lay preachers were mobbed while preaching in the open air. Many of their persecutors either died untimely deaths or were converted. These were men who lived well and died well. Their account makes challenging devotional reading. A survey of eighth graders revealed that their top thirty role models were all either an entertainer or a sports figure. Our children desperately need some better heroes. They can find those heroes within our own spiritual heritage.