

Heroine of the Faith: Phoebe Palmer

Phoebe Palmer was “the mother of the Holiness Movement.”

Born Phoebe Worrall in 1807, she was brought up in a devout Methodist home. She married a Methodist homeopathic physician, Walter Palmer. Their first two children died within months of their birth.

In early Methodism, conversion was an emotional experience, and the fact that Phoebe hadn't had such an encounter was a source of trial to her. Finally, she came to understand that belief in God was enough—that if she laid her life on the altar, God Himself would make her holy.

Phoebe and Walter became very interested in John Wesley's writings, especially his doctrine of Christian perfection, which is the belief that a Christian can live free of voluntary sin and that this can happen instantly through a “second work of grace.” She and her family experienced “entire sanctification” sometime during 1837 and felt they should teach others how to experience it for themselves. Phoebe developed a process that divided John Wesley's perfectionism into three parts:

1. Consecrate yourself totally to God.
2. Believe God will sanctify what is consecrated.
3. Tell others about it.

Phoebe and her sister began a series of women's prayer meetings in her home, which became known as the “Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness.” Soon men were included too. They brought together people of many different backgrounds and inspired similar meetings around the country. Phoebe soon became the most influential woman in the most rapidly growing group in America—the Holiness Movement. She

and her husband went on the road teaching the concept of Christian holiness. She started missions and camp meetings, and around 25,000 Americans became believers.

Phoebe inspired other women to follow her example, notably Catherine Booth of the Salvation Army and Frances Willard of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Her theology gave rise to denominations such as the Church of the Nazarene, the Salvation Army, the Church of God and the Pentecostal-Holiness Church.

*Adapted from **Felicity Dale's** blog, Kingdom Women. Felicity Dale is the author of numerous books including Simply Church. She is an advocate for women in the church and trains people to start simple, organic house churches around the world.*