

Anna's Witness

Luke 2:36-38

Anna's life is full of joy and adversity. At the age of 23, her husband tragically dies in an accident. He was such a godly man and they had such hopes for their life together. All those specific hopes expire on that day of his death. Yet hope itself does not die within her. She knows that God is eternal and sovereign and good.

Anna decides that the Lord has a different plan than the one that she imagines. She yields herself to God and gives herself to serve the LORD in the Temple. She commits her life to fasting and to prayer. She knows that her people Israel are not a spiritually healthy nation. There is so much hypocrisy and corruption even among the religious leaders! She also knows the promise of God to bring redemption and revival to Israel through a Messiah to come.

So, daily she speaks God's Word to all who listen to her. God uses her mightily to strengthen the faith of God's people as they wait for God's promise of a future King.

On a sunny morning, Anna walks in to the Temple in Jerusalem just as she had done every day for the past 60 years. She is eager to pray for revival among her people, to intercede for the many in her fellowship who suffer in various ways, to bring praise to the LORD for His love, to give thanks to the LORD for His provision and to share spiritual hope to all who come to the Temple. Her heart is full of joy in the Holy Spirit.

The Temple on this day is full of activity. Animals are being led to make blood sacrifices as an atonement for sin. Anna hears the bleating of sheep, the chirping of birds, the rustling of feet, the melody of music, and the banter of many conversations echoing off the stone walls. Some in the crowd are coming to offer gifts to the LORD. Some are coming to pray. Some are coming to be ministered to by the priests. Some are coming to celebrate Bar Mizvahs. Some are coming to be purified from various causes of uncleanness. t

While the day is ordinary, it is a bit different in that a story is reverberating throughout the region among the common people. For over the past month, some shepherds have been telling a story about an angel appearing to them in the middle of the night while they were out watching over their flock.

Anna hears how one shepherd reported, "*You would not believe what happened to us! We were having a peaceful night watching over our sheep. The stars and moon were shining in the darkness so we could see a bit. But suddenly*

the whole sky lit up with a brightness far surpassing the noon day sun! I immediately closed my eyes from the discomfort and then opened them just a crack. And I saw a person filled with light just hovering in the sky! I quickly realized that this is an angel! And I tell you, fear filled my soul. I froze and could not move from my place. My legs and arms began to tremble. Then I looked around and saw all my buddies were having the same reaction!

The angel then spoke with a voice that flowed with power, 'Fear not!' he said. 'I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.'

When Anna heard this story, she knew that she was hearing it not first-hand, but third, fourth or fifth-hand. She wondered, *"Could it be true that now is the time for our city Jerusalem to be redeemed as the scriptures tell us? Is it possible that the glory that I have waited for our people Israel to experience is upon us? Is now the time for God's promises to be fulfilled?"*

Anna did not know what to make of it, but she wanted so desperately to find out more. The report of the Messiah being born is on her thoughts as she walked into the Temple on this day. She has waited and waited for this hope all her 84 years. Could it be?

On the way in to the Temple, she speaks briefly to Simeon. They have been acquainted for as long as they can remember and they know that they share in each other's hope for the Deliverer that God had promised to come. Simeon is a man full of the Holy Spirit and he has also heard this rumor about the shepherds sighting. They speak briefly together and Simeon even tells her that the Lord had revealed to him that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah/King with his own eyes! This intensifies Anna's emotions. They depart to their own respective duties with the thought that maybe . . . maybe the Lord has sent the one who would be born the King of the Jews.

Unbeknownst to Anna, at that very moment, a young husband and wife are entering the Temple with their nearly seven-week old son. The wife, Mary, is a godly young lady who has been ceremonially unclean for the past 41 days after giving birth to her son. She longs to rejoin Temple worship and to engage in normal life as a "clean" woman. The Temple is the place for her cleansing. According to God's law and as a poor family, Mary and Joseph bring two turtledoves for the offering to the Lord . . . one dove for a burnt offering and one for a sin offering. (See Leviticus 12:1-8) Through this offering, Mary is acknowledging her own need for God's forgiveness of her own sins.

This couple also knows that God's Law requires for the first-born son of every Jewish family to be specifically dedicated to the Lord (Exodus 13:1-2). This couple enters the Temple for the purpose of honoring the Lord by presenting Jesus to Him. It is a big day for their family. As they enter the Temple, they look like any other young family. They are not greeted as celebrities. They have the kinds of conversations with others that are common in this setting. Everything seemed quite normal . . . until . . . until . . . an old man standing about ten feet away turns to look upon them. When he sees the baby in Mary's arms, his face lights up like . . . well, like Christmas! He is aglow with joy! He rushes over to the couple, *"Praise God! Praise God! Praise God! It IS true! He is here!"* When he reaches them, he asks to hold the baby in his arms. He tells them that all his life he had waited for the Lord to fulfill the promises that He made to Israel. He hoped that the Messiah would come sometime during his lifetime. Recently, the Holy Spirit revealed to him that indeed he would not see death until he saw the Messiah/King with his own eyes!

Simeon tells them, *"Since that day, I have prayed that this might be the day. I looked and looked for the one who is the Son of the Most High. And today, God's promise to me is complete! Here He is!!"*

As Mary passes her month old over to Simeon to cradle tenderly, Simeon begins to praise God saying, *"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."* (Luke 2:29-32 *ESV*)

Mary and Joseph were not expecting this! They looked at each other amazed. They knew that their son was virgin born. They knew what the angel had said about him. But Simeon deepened their faith in the infant divine Person whom they cradle and care for as their son.

While all this is happening, Anna hears the words that Simeon is shouting in the Temple! With joyful expectation she also rushes over to Mary and Joseph. She too asks to cradle Jesus in her arms. As she holds him close, she gives thanks to God saying, "You promised us redemption and now redemption is here! Thank you, faithful Father for sending us this Savior!"

After Joseph and Mary and Jesus depart from the Temple, Anna spends the rest of her days speaking of Him to those who believed the promises of scripture. Her witness strengthened the hearts of many!

This morning, we focus upon Anna. This woman whose encounter with Jesus motivates her to devote the rest of her life to telling others about Him.

What does Anna's story teach us? I believe that Anna gives five testimonials to God that arouse us to worship Him.

Main Idea: God is good. God is able. God is worthy. God is gracious. God is big.

Five Testimonials to God's Glory

Testimonial #1: Though my life is hard, God is good.
"The Lord supplies my need."

Anna likely married the love of her life when she was 16 or 17 years of age. God gave her to her husband and her husband to her. Luke tells us that Anna was a virgin when she wed. This couple began their marriage covenant in purity and lived life rooted in the Bible and centered on the LORD.

I imagine a marriage filled with joy, laughter, love, dreams, shared burdens, sexual union and sweet fellowship. A healthy marriage is one of God's great gifts in this present world. And for seven years, Anna experienced this gift and gave thanks to God for it. Yet in the seventh year, God ordained a deep trial for Anna. The LORD took from her the lover of her soul. So many plans abruptly came to an end. The mornings filled with joyful banter were over. The days working side by side were through. The evening nestling in each others arms had ended. What is left? Grief. Sorrow. Tears. Inner anguish.

What did Anna do in the midst of such a trial. Well, let us first consider what Anna DID NOT do.

- Anna did not shake her fist in resentment against the LORD.
- Anna did not wallow in self-pity and despair.
- Anna did not look for a quick marriage as a human solution to her pain.
- Anna did not allow her loss to define her life.
- Anna did not stop worshipping the LORD.

What did Anna do? She grieves like any other human in this great trial. But she grieves UPWARD. She grieves with hope. Anna leans in toward the LORD and not away from Him. Anna trusts God in the dark place of her anguish. Anna deepens her worship in her weakness. Her heart exclaims, "Though life is hard. God is good!"

One commentator writes, “*A Father’s hand will never cause His child a needless tear.*”

Luke tells us that Anna was a “prophetess”. I believe that this simply means that God gifted Anna with the ability to explain the Bible and to apply it helpfully to other peoples lives.

We are not sure WHEN Anna became a prophetess. Was she a prophetess BEFORE she lost her husband, or AFTER. I tend to think it was AFTER because that period of her life was set aside for worship and ministry in the Temple. But regardless, don’t you think Anna’s tragic loss added influence to her ministry?

Truth: Our weaknesses build the strongest bridges to influence others for Christ. Our strengths may impress or intimidate. But our weakness open doors and build confidence in others that God is real.

When a person experiences severe hardship and comes through with vibrant faith, we are more likely to believe that they have something important to say. I listened to my brother Jim all his life. He was a wise man. But I listened with deeper interest, intensity and humility as he walked with Jesus through his battle with terminal cancer.

I know many of you who have navigated terrible trials . . . the kind of trials that I pray no one will ever endure. Some of you who have endured such trials and come through them with a purified faith. Though tempted to let go, you held firmly on to Jesus by faith.

I want to tell you, I listen to you. When you speak about God, about the Gospel, about wisdom, about worship, about life, I know you have something really important to say . . . something you learned while holding on to God in the fire.

Illustration: Recently visited Joy Siebenborn in the hospital. She is a relatively young woman (relative to me). But God has placed her in a very hard trial. She has been in the hospital since October 31st. She has endured so much terrible pain. She shared with me that she was getting very discouraged by the pain day after day, week after week and now month after month. “Then I thought how much Jesus suffered for me.” She spoke with worship and adoration for Jesus on her lips. And I listened.

We witness more influentially to God’s goodness through our weaknesses and trials than through our strengths and successes.

Testimonial #1: Though my life is hard, God is good.
"The Lord supplies my need."

Testimonial #2: Though my life is long, God is able.
"The Lord keeps me growing every day."

Anna lives 60 years after her husband dies. At the moment of this story, she was 84 years of age. (as an aside, some believe that the text should be translated that Anna live 84 years after her husband had died. If that is true, Anna is 104 at this time.). Either way . . . she is an old woman. Few people in her day live to this age. No modern medicines to stave off pain. No modern surgery to fix internal problems. Yet here she is more vibrant, more engaged, more lively in the Spirit than ever.

Question: At what age do you stop growing? I like to tell the story that I met my wife two years before she met me. So I remember meeting her at the church youth group as a freshman in high school. The problem was that I was shorter than her until my junior year in high school. So when I met her again as a junior, we were finally able to see eye to eye. But even then, my body was just slow to mature. So in college I added an inch to my height and some whiskers to my face. I think I stopped growing taller around age 19.

At what age do you stop growing? Anna answers that question spiritually for us. The normal Christian life is a life of growth all the way until the day that we die. Now that might not be the AVERAGE Christian life, but it is the NORMAL Christian life.

When a person believes in Jesus as Savior and Lord, he/she receives the life of God in their soul. This life moves us toward Christlikeness. To grow as a Christian means that we are growing to be more like Jesus in His thoughts, His attitudes, His behavior, His obedience to the Father, His love, His zeal for God's glory, His everything! We never reach our goal in this present life. We will become like Jesus when we see Him face to face in glory. But UNTIL then, God gives us the ability to make progress . . . to advance . . . to grow in our likeness to Jesus.

Anna gives testimony to an important element in our life with God, **"Though my life is long, God is able . . . He is able to keep me strong and advancing toward Christlikeness. *"The Lord keeps me growing every day."***

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16 [ESV](#))

Truth: The Normal Christian life is a life of progress in Christlikeness all the way to the end. This is not the Average Christian life. It is the Normal Christian Life. Few in our day and culture attain it. Not because of an innate inability, but because of an self-focused stubbornness of heart.

Anna's influence upon God's people lay in her endurance to keep growing in grace over the course of her long life. We are not told of Anna's talents or gifts. Not told of Anna's resources. Not told of Anna's social influence. For all we know, she was a woman with very little talent, very few financial resources and a bit nerdy . . . little social influence. If she had an Instagram account, she would have had few followers. **Anna's influence is tied to her vibrant spiritual life with God.**

What makes a church strong? Godly members. Not great talents. Not great resources. Not great numbers. Great likeness to Jesus.

Nowhere does the Bible teach that we need to obtain more talent, more resources, more social influence. Yet what consumes our mind and heart? And as Christians, we baptize these pursuits by saying, *"If I had more talent, if I had more resources, if I had more influence with people, THEN I could really do something of importance for the Lord."*

Older Christian, let me encourage you. Your age does not preclude you from growing more and more like Jesus. You and I NEED to grow. We are a long way from our goal. There are SO MANY ways that we are not YET like Jesus.

God will bring us there on the day we see Him. BUT in the meantime, the will of God for you and me is increasing sanctification . . . devotion to God, personal holiness, Christlikeness in every way. Anna shows us that vigor in our spiritual life is NORMAL for the Christian. Be encouraged by her testimony. Do not coast in to the last years of your life as though there is no more ability or need to grow! Rise each day with a fresh vision for spiritual transformation in your own soul!

Testimonial #1: Though my life is hard, God is good.

"The Lord supplies my need."

Testimonial #2: Though my life is long, God is able.

"The Lord keeps me growing every day."

Testimonial #3: Though my life is full, God is worthy.
“The Lord reveals Himself to me.”

Like every person on the face of the earth, her life had so many options. She could have filled her day with so many other good and interesting activities. But what did Anna choose as a focus for her time and energy?

First, she was a prophetess. That means that she talked about the Lord and His good plan of redemption to people. She wanted to be a faithful instrument to encourage others with the Word.

Second, Luke tells us, “*“She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.”* (Luke 2:37 [ESV](#))

Every day she did the same thing. She prayed. She worshipped. She served. Every day for 60 years. Do you think she wasted her life?

When I think of Anna, I think of the words that Jesus spoke to Martha about her sister Mary. You remember the story. There were lots of people gathered in their home. Martha busied herself with all the details of food, wine, and social interactions to keep everyone comfortable and feeling good. This is a noble work! But she grows frustrated with her sister Mary for not helping her with this work. Mary is sitting at Jesus feet, enjoying His Person and revelling in her fellowship with Him. Martha complains to Jesus thinking that Jesus is going to be sympathetic to her point of view.

She says, “*“Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.”*” (Luke 10:40 [ESV](#))

“*But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”*” (Luke 10:41-42 [ESV](#))

Anna had lots of options for how she would spend her day. She committed herself to investing in worship and fellowship with her LORD. Truth: When we invest our time in worship, we invest in that which is most important to God and that which is most valuable to ourselves and others.

Question: Is that realistic?

In understand the matter. This week is an awesome week for my family. My niece is to be wed this afternoon. My sons and their families are gathered. Lots of others family is in town. I see crazy energy and needs of the babies, the

toddlers and the children. I know the work required from a mom and dad. Is it realistic to think that a huge part of life can be carved out to worship?

First, Anna's life changes after she loses her husband. That is true. So circumstances do make a difference in our time and energy. In my latter years, I realize I have more time for peaceful contemplation of the scriptures and for worship than my sons and daughters do. If we do have this kind of time, the question we ask, "Am I using the extra time to devote myself more completely to worship and service in God's kingdom?"

Second, it is possible to be like Anna and Mary even in a busy world of responsibilities. Yes, some of those responsibilities are immovable. Babies have to be fed, bathed and cared for. But some of those responsibilities have to be placed on the second shelf of our life. God places worship on the top shelf of our priority in our life. We are created for this . . . to know God, to love God, to serve God. Worship is a non-negotiable for those who understand what life is.

Truth: No matter our circumstances in life, we will not enjoy fellowship with God without denying ourselves. We must set the Lord as first in our hearts if we will receive the joy of His fellowship.

Friends, whether you are young or old, life and Satan himself will give you reasons why you do not have time for a life centered upon the worship of God. But you are created for worship! You will not experience life as God designs life apart from a heart that says, "God is worthy! I will worship!"

Illustration: Brother Jim. He would frequently take time in the middle of the activity of family parties . . . these are special occasions to him. But he would separate himself for some time in prayer and fellowship with God. I think this is why he was able to have such peace through his terminal illness. His soul was fed with prioritizing what God created him for. Anna did the same!

Application: The LORD is worthy of rearranging our priorities so that we devote the first part of our time and attention to Him. Let us seek the LORD for a renewed heart of worship in this new year!

Do you think Anna has any regrets for committing so much of her life to worship? No one who worships the LORD ever regrets this investment of life.

Testimonial #1: Though my life is hard, God is good.

“The Lord supplies my need.”

Testimonial #2: Though my life is long, God is able.

“The Lord keeps me growing every day.”

Testimonial #3: Though my life is full, God is worthy.

“The Lord reveals Himself to me.”

Testimonial #4: Though my life is sinful, God is gracious.

“The Lord redeems me and my people from the curse.”

After Anna holds Jesus in her arms, she gives thanks and **talks about him to all those who were “waiting for the redemption of Israel.”**

Redemption means “to be purchased out of slavery . . . to be set free.” She knows the big story of the Bible.

She knows that Jesus is the prophet who is greater than Moses. Moses was used by God to redeem Israel out of bondage to Egypt. But Jesus is the One who redeems Israel out of bondage to sin itself!

Anna’s name means “grace”. She lives her whole life thinking about the grace of God in promising a Savior who would die as a sacrifice for sin.

Anna knows that sin is our big problem. The problem with human society is not a lack of education or a lack of economic opportunity or a lack of social programs. Anna knows that the problem with society is our rebellion against the LORD.

She knows this about herself. She personally that she is a sinner and that she personally needs God’s forgiveness.

She knows this about her nation. Her people are filled with conflict and corruption. Her people are striving against Rome, striving against each other, striving against the LORD. Her people are walking in darkness . . . though they have the scriptures, they do not listen to God with submissive hearts. While they may read God’s Word, they read it with selfish, blind, obstinate hearts.

So when she sees Jesus, her heart explodes with joyful anticipation of the redemption that God is bringing! The LORD is so gracious that He is looking upon her sinful heart and sending His Messiah to complete the sacrifice for her to be clean. The LORD is so gracious that He is looking upon the rebellion of His people, Israel, and sending His Son to give them a vibrant future as a nation.

Anna marvels at the grace of God in Jesus. She cannot stop talking about Him!

Truth: The natural response for one who marvels in Jesus is to tell others about Jesus. The gift is too great to keep Him a secret!

Illustration: A gift I gave to Kimberly for anniversary and Christmas and birthday . . . for next few years. Go in to Costco to buy a \$5 chicken and come out with major purchase! I am honored when she tells others. God is honored when we exult in His gift to us!

Go, tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere.
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born.

Testimonial #1: Though my life is hard, God is good.
"The Lord supplies my need."

Testimonial #2: Though my life is long, God is able.
"The Lord keeps me growing every day."

Testimonial #3: Though my life is full, God is worthy.
"The Lord reveals Himself to me."

Testimonial #4: Though my life is sinful, God is gracious.
"The Lord redeems me and my people from the curse."

Testimonial #5: Though my life is small, God is big.
"The Lord chooses to use me for His great kingdom."

Anna is a simple widow woman. One of millions that have walked this earth. She lives quietly in fasting and worship. We know NOTHING about her life other than what we read from Luke's gospel. She does not appear on Time's Person of the Year. Her name is not on the list of the 100 most influential people of the Year. She is much like you and me. Living out her life in a small place in a small way. She suffers much in her early life making her more vulnerable to a diminished life.

Yet the LORD connects Anna's life to eternal significance. God chooses to use her in such a way as to merit our talking about her this morning some 2000 years after she dies. God places her obscure life on the main stage of His work of redemption in the world.

Anna does not need to be recorded in scripture to have a life that is eternally significant. If Luke never mentioned her, her life would have been used by the LORD in an eternal fashion. Very few get a mention in God's eternal Book. But God does mention her . . . and I think He names her to encourage each one of us who think, *"I live such a small life. My life has been diminished by trials and a lack of opportunity. I am not making much of a difference in this world."*

Friends, everyone wants to live a life that matters. But what kind of life is that? For some, it is a life of prosperity. For others, a life of social help. For others, a life of great achievement. What is a life that matters? The GOSPEL answers that question.

Truth: A life that matters is a life that knows God and worships Him as God. Worship makes our life matter forever. **A life connected to the LORD is a life connected to eternal significance.**

On his deathbed, Matthew Henry, whose commentary on the whole Bible is still widely used almost 300 years after his death, said to a friend, **"You have been used to take notice of the sayings of dying men—this is mine: that a life spent in the service of God and communion with Him, is the most pleasant life that anyone can live in this world."**

Conclusion:

Main Idea: God is good. God is able. God is worthy. God is gracious. God is big.

Do you believe in this God of Anna's? If not, He calls you to believe in Him. We benefit from Christmas . . . from Jesus coming to the earth as a man . . . only as we believe upon Him.

If you do believe in Jesus, then every part of your life changes. The NORMAL Christian life is one of endurance through trials. The NORMAL Christian life is one of growth through every year of life. The NORMAL Christian life is one of worship as a priority. The NORMAL Christian life is one of rejoicing in God's grace. The NORMAL Christian life is one of eternal significance. Let us NOT settle for anything less than the NORMAL Christian life!!

Five Testimonials to God's Glory

Testimonial #1: Though my life is hard, God is good.
“The Lord supplies my need.”

Testimonial #2: Though my life is long, God is able.
“The Lord keeps me growing every day.”

Testimonial #3: Though my life is full, God is worthy.
“The Lord reveals Himself to me.”

Testimonial #4: Though my life is sinful, God is gracious.
“The Lord redeems me and my people from the curse.”

Testimonial #5: Though my life is small, God is big.”
“The Lord chooses to use me for His great kingdom.”