

One Anna, One Purpose

By Mary Kane

One day at school, two of my students were involved in a scuffle over something that happened at recess. In the course of their argument, one little boy hit the other boy. I called both of the boys out in the hallway to discuss and hopefully resolve the problem. When I asked the boys for details about the argument, one of the boys told me that he “accidentally on purpose” hit the other boy. Accidentally on purpose? This was a new one for me. In my twenty-five years of teaching I had never heard of an “accidental on purpose” hitting. I quickly explained to Boy 2 that it was not possible to do anything “accidentally on purpose.” He did his best to maintain his innocence, but in the end he had to stand on the line at the next recess.

Accidentally living a life of purpose isn’t possible either. Living an effective life for Christ will only be accomplished through intentional, purposeful planning; it will not happen by accident. One woman in the New Testament knew all about living “on purpose.” Her whole life was devoted to one purpose—Jesus.

Please take a moment to confess to the Lord any sin that is on your heart. Ask your heavenly Father to fill you afresh with His Holy Spirit. Now please read Luke 2:33-38.

What is the name of the woman mentioned in this passage of Scripture?

The NKJV translates verse 36 as, “Now there was *one*, Anna, a prophetess.” *One* can be a powerful number. Verse 36 is an encouragement to go ahead and be the only *one* who is willing to stand for Christ, the only *one* who is willing to wait for Christ and the only *one* who is willing to live for Christ. *One*—like Anna.

What was her occupation?

She was a prophetess. The Greek word for *prophetess* is *prophetis* which means "a woman to whom future events or things hidden from others are at times revealed, either by inspiration or by dreams and visions." In order for Anna to have been known as a prophetess she had to have experienced other visions and dreams whose interpretations were found to be trustworthy. *Prophetess* is used only two times in the New Testament; once in the Book of Revelation to describe the false prophetess Jezebel and once in this passage to describe Anna.

Why do you think God revealed things to Anna that He kept hidden from other people?

According to verses 36-38, what "hidden thing" had the Lord revealed to Anna?

I believe that the Lord had revealed to Anna that Jesus, the son of Joseph and Mary was the Christ, the one for whom she had been waiting for all of her life. I believe that *hidden things* were revealed to Anna because she spent so much time in the Presence of the Lord. The more time we spend with Him, the more He has opportunity to reveal things to us. It is wonderful that God choose to reveal the identity of the Christ to a woman as well as a man. In reference to this event Matthew Henry stated, "Christ was revealed to a man[Simeon] and a woman [Anna]. No male or female slave or free. Christ has come for everyone" and, "He is taken notice of by one Anna, or Ann, a prophetess, that one of each sex might bear witness to him in whom both men and women are invited to believe, that they may be saved." Jesus values men and women on an equal basis.

How old was Anna?

All of the resources I checked agreed that Anna quite possibly could have been more than one hundred years old. In the United States of America we seem to believe that useful work is only accomplished by the young; that once a person reaches the age of 65 it's time to buy a rocking chair and take up knitting. God, however, is not bound by age. As long as a person is still drawing breath, God has meaningful work for that person to do.

What did Anna do for the eighty-four years that she was a widow?

Scripture states that Anna did not depart from the temple day or night and that she served the Lord with prayer and fasting. Upon the death of her husband, Anna did not move into the home of her best friend; neither did she seek the companionship of another husband. She moved in with the Lord (after all, Jesus calls us to abide with Him). I believe Anna decided to trust God to provide for her as a husband as He promised in Isaiah 4:4-5.

No one would have blamed Anna for seeking remarriage (she was still relatively young) or for taking up residence with a close friend or relative, but God had another special purpose in mind for her. Anna was chosen to be one of a very select group of people who had the privilege of announcing the arrival of the Savior.

Some commentators believe the phrase "did not depart from the temple" means that Anna was in constant attendance at the temple whenever it was open. Other commentators believe that Anna literally took up residence on the temple grounds and lived there for the remainder of her life. Wherever she resided; temple or home, however she resided; single by choice or by circumstance, Anna had one purpose in her life, to seek Jesus. Her whole life was about seeking Jesus.

Please go back and read verse 37 again and fill in the missing word.

"...who did not depart from the temple, but _____ God with fastings and prayers night and day."

The word for *served* used in this verse is *latreuō* which is a Greek word that means “to serve, to minister to, to worship, to offer gifts.” We see from this definition that prayer and worship are directly linked. If your prayer life is thriving your worship life will be thriving also.

For what was Anna was praying and fasting (verse 38 gives us a possible hint)?

Usually people fast and pray when they are faced a great challenge or are longing for a greater measure of God’s Presence in their lives. Since the time of the Fall; when God removed people from his Presence, and the departure of God’s glory from the temple; when God removed His presence from his people, faithful Hebrews have anticipated the return of his Presence. Anna was also looking for a greater measure of God’s Presence in her life. Finally, after a lifetime of watching and waiting, Anna witnessed His arrival.

Anna must have seen hundreds of baby dedications in the temple during the many years that she served the Lord. One day, however, one little baby caught her eye— Anna immediately recognized the Son of God!

How did Anna recognize the Messiah?

I believe that she recognized her Messiah the same way that Elizabeth did. Please read Luke 1:39-44.

How did Elizabeth recognize her Savior even before He was born?

By the power of the Holy Spirit. Have you ever “just known” something in your spirit or “felt” the Holy Spirit tell you something? Sometimes I will know that God wants me to do something or I will know God is telling me something because He will bring His thoughts to my mind. Other Christians I know have had similar experiences. I believe these occurrences are similar to what Anna and Elizabeth experienced.

Have you had a similar experience?

Let’s go back for a moment and consider an important phrase from verse 38.

Please fill in the missing words in the blank below:

“ _____ that instant she gave thanks to the Lord...”

Coming in is derived from the Greek word *ephistemi* which means “to place at, to stand by, to be present, of persons coming *upon one suddenly*” (emphasis mine). We can be going about our everyday life, faithfully seeking God day after day, year after year and suddenly He will show up in an unexpected way and things are never the same. I can just imagine Anna rising in the morning and anxiously making her way to the temple to pray. Suddenly, she stops short and is drawn to a young couple with a baby. As her heart pounds, Anna knows beyond anything she has ever known, that she is looking at her Savior.

In verse 38, why does Anna give thanks to the Lord?

I believe it’s because God bestowed upon her the privilege of seeing her Savior face to face. The presence of God once again is made manifest on earth among His people.

What did Anna do after she saw Jesus and gave thanks?

The prophetess became evangelist.

To whom did Anna speak about Jesus?

To all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

Where are you looking for redemption? Is there anything in which you are trusting to save you besides Jesus?

How can we be like Anna in our modern world? Is there anything that we can take from Anna's life and apply to our own? We can:

Seek: Anna sought God continually. We can too. Purposefully make time to seek Him every day, first thing in the morning. If He is important to you, you'll make time.

Pray: Anna prayed in the temple day and night. We can pray for our friends, our families, our nation and for the lost of the world. Look for opportunities to pray each day. You won't have to look far.

Fast: Anna served God with fasting. Modern day Christians can also participate in the discipline of fasting. Choose a meal to give up on a certain day. Fast from the pleasures of the world or fast from social media. A relevant fast in this present economy would be to fast from buying things.

Speak: Anna told all who would listen about the arrival of the Messiah. Now, it's our turn to continue to spread Anna's message to all who need redemption. We all are called to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Anna put herself in a position to have purpose; she surrounded herself with the things of God. The simple life of Anna is a perfect picture of how to live purposeful life for Christ: Seek Him, serve Him, and tell all who will listen about His grace.

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

By Mary Kane

Copyright 2011. All rights reserved.

www.onlybyprayer.com