

131222am Giving Like Anna.Docx

Giving To God Like Anna: A Life of Thanks

Luke 2:36-38

God's Word calls us to especially ponder one question this season: Have we given to God our greatest and dearest treasures this Christmas?

In the Gospels, five lives have been immortalized by God for what they did. Each of them gave far more than a single gift, they each demonstrate:

A Life Focused on Giving to God

Think of that. Five individuals did something that *only God really saw*, and what only a few others barely witnessed as they watched. But what those five did has become a part of what will last forever and ever.

This morning each of us are also offered the opportunity each day to do things only God really sees, and what few if any others get to witness, but when we give ourselves in acts of obedient offerings to God, we become a part of something that will last forever and ever.

1. **Giving to God Like Mary: A Life of Consecration** (Luke 1:26-55) which we saw was giving our attention to God, giving our independence to God, giving our body to God, giving our future to God, giving our schedule to God. That is giving a life of consecration to God like Mary.
2. **Giving to God Like the Shepherds: A Life Wrapped with Humility** (Luke 2:8-20) which we saw was coming to God like we are, listening to God when He speaks, responding to God immediately, going against the crowd, seeking Christ until we find Him, telling everyone the Good News.
3. **Giving to God Like Simeon: A Life of Walking in the Spirit** (Luke 2:22-35) which we saw was seeking each day to be emptied of self, filled with the Spirit, illumined by the Spirit, and led by the Spirit.
4. **Giving to God Like Anna: A Life of Thanks** (Luke 2:36-38) which we means giving our life to God; giving our words to God; giving our circumstances to God; giving our physical presence to God; giving our spiritual consciousness to God; giving our spiritual disciplines to God; giving our thanks to God.

Meet Anna

As we open to Luke 2:36, and are introduced to the life of Anna, I'd ask you to underline two words in your mind. First, in v. 36 "she was of great age"—underline in your mind **OLD**. Second, in v. 37 "a widow of about 84 years"—underline in your mind **ALONE**.

There you go, in two words you could describe the woman we are going to meet this morning. **Anna was OLD and ALONE.**

Yet from this account God gives to us, this old and alone woman was also vibrant, filled with joy, overflowing with God's Word and in love with the Lord.

Think about the limited resources Anna had to live this life we see, she had God's Word and the Spirit of God. But, just like most of the saints of Old Testament and the early church, Anna had no personal copy of God's Word.

But even with limited access to the Word, she flourished, because of the *unlimited access she had to God*. Anna was a powerful example of a godly woman—from the Old Testament! And how does God describe this godly woman? Was she perfect? No, she was not perfect, but she has a life dominated by choices to obey and follow the Lord.

Anna, like any other godly woman may fail here and there, sin now and then, give up from time to time—but her life is characterized and dominated by choices to seek to follow God's Word.

That describes Anna, that describes a godly woman, that is what God always wants, and that can describe YOU! She is just what any woman who knows the Lord would want to become:

A Godly Old Testament Woman of Grace

As we read this incredible account, open your heart to God's Word as He speaks to us today:

*Luke 2:36-38 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. **She was of a great age**, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37 and this woman was **a widow of about eighty-four years**, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And coming in that instant **she gave thanks to the Lord**, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. NKJV*

PRAY

There are seven elements of Anna's life that God relates to us in words of these three verses. As we walk through these lessons, open your heart, see if you have yet given to God these same gifts that Anna gave to Him. If not, why not start today?

1. **Anna's life mattered to God.** v. 36a "*Now there was one, Anna*".

Anna mattered to God, He knew all about her. God knew where Anna lived, what she did, how she thought, what she felt. God knew her, and He knew the power that just one life can have for Him. God uses individuals. God wants you and me to allow, invite, and welcome Him to use us. That is what God found in Anna's life: something He looks for all throughout the earth. **Anna gave her life back to God.**

Listen to one of the secrets of how God operates. He explained that to us, and probably in her long life, Anna had heard or even read these words:

2 Chronicles 16:9 (NKJV) For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of *those* whose heart *is* loyal to Him...

God is looking for those who will un-reservedly, completely pledge their lives to His will, His plans, His bidding.

The gift God wants from each of us this year is to, like Anna: **Give Your Life to God.**

2. **Anna spoke God's Word.** v. 36b "*a prophetess*".

Anna spoke God's Word. That is what Old Testament prophetesses did. They are never recorded as having written down any part of God's Word the Bible, so they were not bringing new, inspired revelation. Rather, Anna was one of four Old Testament women who were noted as speaking God's Word to people.

Anna was not a revealer of God's Word, but she was an affirmer of God's Word. Anna was a conduit for God. When He prompted her, she spoke for Him. But she was careful to speak His words and not her own. That meant that Anna was full and overflowing with God's Word. She was known as one who knew what God had said, and when His statements on any situation needed to be affirmed, she was right there speaking for God. **Anna spoke for God.**

I wonder this morning what overflows your life, your thoughts, and your words? Do others know that you have so steeped yourself in God's truth that when you speak, you can affirm what He has said?

God is looking for those who will let His Word so richly (Col. 3:16-17) dwell in them, that whenever God needs them, they will speak for Him.

The gift God wants from each of us this year is to, like Anna: **Give Your Words to God.**

3. Anna lived a normal, painful, struggling, sorrow-filled life.

v. 36c-37a *"the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. **She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years"**.*

Anna lived what is a normal, or typical human life: birth into a family she didn't choose, growing up with little say on most things, marriage to a man into whose hands she entrusted her future, the unexpected death of her life's partner, days of loneliness, years of emptiness, growing physical weakness, and inescapably declining health. Which is what most women throughout history have experienced.

Remember, all these details were put into the Bible by God. He chose to let us know just these events, and they are normal, they are painful, and most of them were completely out of Anna's control.

That is what we call our circumstances: our parents, our upbringing, our marital situation, and our health. Most of our circumstances in life we usually do not control.

God is showing us that Anna had life circumstances that could have produced a great variety of responses. But God is also showing us that she trusted what God had allowed to happen to her, and saw her circumstances as being from His Hand. That is why she can so readily burst into thanksgiving as we saw her do in v. 38. **Anna gave her circumstances into God's Hands.**

God is looking for those who will trust all the circumstances of life that are beyond their control into the loving, all-knowing, all-powerful, and absolutely wise Hands of God: who does control even our circumstances.

The gift God wants from each of us this year is to, like Anna: **Give Your Circumstances to God.**

4. **Anna couldn't stay away from God's house.** v. 37b *"who did not depart from the temple"*.

Again notice what details God has chosen to reveal to us. He could have told us what she looked like: what color her hair was, what kind of clothes she wore, how beautiful her complexion may have been, how smart, artistic, and accomplished she may have been.

Nope. Not a word of all the details that most people are eager to find out about a person. God goes right to what matters most to Him.

God is emphasizing something. **Anna just couldn't refrain from being at God's house**, with God's people, and around God's worship. She was glued, drawn, riveted, and captivated by things of God so much that people associated her with God, and God's Word (a "prophetess", remember), and God's Temple.

What draws us so much that we can't stay far away from it speaks volumes to God and those who know us. We could say that Anna just couldn't stay away from there. What does God, and those who know you see as where "YOU just can't stay away from"?

Are you known as a shopper? (you just can't stay away from stores and sales).

Are you known as an online presence that comments, posts, updates, uploads, pins, pokes, and sends pictures about everything possible? (you just can't stay away from your electronic devices).

Or, are you drawn to God so much that you just can't refrain from praying, listening to God speak in His Word, and thinking about how incredible He is all day long? (you just can't stay away from God's presence and people).

God is looking for those who can't stay away from anyplace associated with God.

The gift God wants from each of us this year is to, like Anna: **Give Your Time to God.**

5. **Anna worshipped God with, from, by, and through her spirit.** v. 37c *"but served God"*.

Anna was also not only physically drawn to God's place, she was also spiritually drawn to His worship. Anna knew that the greatest way to serve God is to start with

worship. Worship is not merely music, worship is giving an offering to God. It can be offering words through music, but that is only the start.

Worship is when God overwhelms our mind, our thoughts, our will, our desires, our emotions, and our feelings (all the non-materials parts of our being). Worship is when we give our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength to God.

Anna could serve God in her spirit, in her mind, by her offerings of feelings of love and devotion to Him. Anna chose to harness her whole being to a Godward focus. **Anna gave her self to devotedly, consciously worship God.**

We need to ponder William Temple's definition of worship to measure our personal worship temperature and health: **true worship** quickens our conscience by the holiness of God; feeds our minds with the truth of God; purges our imagination by the beauty of God; opens our hearts to the love of God; and devotes our will to the purpose of God."

This word for serving God is not the normal New Testament word for serving. It is a word that flows from worship. Jesus first spoke this word in Matthew 4:10 as He said to "worship the Lord thy God and Him only shall you **serve**". Paul confessed in Romans 1:9 that his life was all about this type of **servicing** "God with his spirit". Paul went on to define genuine believers as those offer this type of **service** as they "worship God in the Spirit". Finally, in Revelation 7:15 and 22:3 when the saints are gathered in Heaven around the Throne, we see our eternal gifts to God as we "**serve**" God by offering Him this type of worship.

God is looking for those who can't stay away from any opportunity to offer their worshipful service to God.

The gift God wants from each of us this year is to, like Anna: **Give Your Devoted Worship to God.**

6. Anna offered spiritual disciplines to God. v. 37d "with fastings and prayers night and day".

Anna pursued the spiritual disciplines of self-denial (fasting), and God-seeking (prayer). She denied self and cried out to God as disciplined choices throughout her last days. Anna learned the secret of how to keep her flesh in check.

We can fast from food, or from special things that are our favorites, that draw us. We fast from them to remind our flesh that God alone is worthy of our deepest hungerings and longings.

It can become a modern spiritual discipline to fast from favorite movies, games, internet, social media, and shopping. We can learn to fast from anything: in order to affirm that God is most important.

God is looking for those who will cultivate spiritual disciplines of fasting and praying.

The gift God wants from each of us this year is to, like Anna: **Give Your Spiritual Disciplines to God.**

7. Anna Gave Thanks to God. v. 38 *“And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem”.*

Anna was on God’s schedule. She was ready to offer Him her overflowing offering of thanks. She was so sure of God she could talk about Him to those who were seeking Him. Anna gave the fruit of her lips as Hebrews 13:15 calls what we are to give God.

Heb. 13:15 (NKJV) Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

Finally, when the saints safely arrive in their Father’s House, we see our overflowing thanks offered to the Almighty in Rev. 4:9 and 11:17, this instant and eternal thanks to God.

Rev. 4:9-10, 11:17 (NKJV) Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 11:17 “We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.

God is looking for those who will look at life, see God’s Hand, and offer thanks.

The gift God wants from each of us this year is to, like Anna: **Give Your Thanks to God.**

Giving to God a Life of Thanks

This morning each of us are also offered the opportunity each day to do things only God really sees, and what few if any others get to witness, but when we give ourselves in acts of obedient offerings to God, we become a part of something that will last forever and ever.

1. **Giving to God Like Mary: A Life of Consecration** (Luke 1:26-55)
2. **Giving to God Like the Shepherds: A Life Wrapped with Humility** (Luke 2:8-20)
3. **Giving to God Like Simeon: A Life of Walking in the Spirit** (Luke 2:22-35)
4. **Giving to God Like Anna: A Life of Thanks** (Luke 2:36-38) which we saw means giving our life to God; giving our words to God; giving our circumstances to God; giving our physical presence to God; giving our focused worship to God; giving our spiritual disciplines to God; and giving our thanks to God.

Thanking God for His Faithfulness

Why not join me in a practice for our songs in Heaven, as we stand and sing to our Almighty God: **Great is Thy Faithfulness**

Great is Thy faithfulness," O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

"Great is Thy faithfulness!" "Great is Thy faithfulness!"
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
"Great is Thy faithfulness," Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!