

A Woman Who Glorifies God*

Introduction: How Can I Think Biblically about Womanhood?

Example of college woman

Example of Mary, Justin's wife

Now what is a true woman?

A true woman is a true reflection of God's creation design and redemptive calling for women. In Genesis 1, we read that God said, "Let Us make man in Our image. So God created man in His own image, He created him; male and female He created them." I find it fascinating that God did not create a genderless being.

Gender distinctiveness is woven into the very fabric of creation. The man and woman were created equally in God's image but each was assigned a different function in the creation of God's kingdom. This is a reflection of the Trinity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are equal in substance and power, but each assumes a different function in the accomplishment of our redemption. As we read in Ephesians 1:4, the Father chose us before the foundations of the world; in verse 7, the Son redeemed us by His blood; and in verse 13, the Holy Spirit applies that redemption and guarantees that redemption to our hearts. Those distinctions are not blurred but rather harmonized to fulfill the grand and glorious process of redemption.

The man and woman were exquisitely designed to praise God's glorious grace by fulfilling the cultural mandate to multiply, to replenish and to take dominion for God's glory pointing us to the Great Commission. Men and women in the home and in the church are to work in complementarity to advance God's kingdom. God created the man first assigning him the position of headship. Adam was our representative in the covenant of works. We want to focus on God's female design.

Genesis 2: "It wasn't good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for Him." This was God's idea, so we know that it is good. Being designed to be a helper is not an inferior design. It is a wonderful design. Throughout the Old Testament, this word for helper is used many times to refer to God as our Helper. As we examine some of those passages, we begin to understand what it means to be a helper.

In Ex. 18 where Moses said, "My father's God is my helper, He saved me from the sword of Pharaoh", we see a helper defends. In Psalm 20, it says, "May He send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion" – a helper supports. Ps 33 – "We wait in hope for the Lord. He is our help and shield" – a helper protects. Ps 10 – "We see that a helper sees and cares for the suffering." Ps 70 – we see that a helper delivers from distress; and in Psalm 72 – a helper rescues; and finally in Psalm 86 – a helper comforts.

These are strong, relational, nurturing, caring words. They're Gospel words. This is the essence of the true woman.

But the problem is the Fall. [Insert Steve Lawson's earlier session]. When the man and woman rebelled against God's authority, they lost their ability to reflect Him.

But into this darkness came the Gospel. In Genesis 3:15 We read that God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman." Surely they stood there breathless as they heard these words. God said "I will". Here we see sovereign initiative, sovereign grace. I

will do for them what they cannot do for themselves. But He goes on... “and between your offspring and hers, he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.” Can you imagine them standing there and hearing this?

What was their response to this first proclamation of the Gospel? I find this absolutely riveting. In verse 20, Adam named his wife. Naming is an indicator of headship. Because of the Gospel, the man was restored to his calling to be the head. He named his wife, Eve, because she would become the mother of all living. Eve was restored to her ability to be a helper.

The name Eve means life giver. This is more than biological. Yes, she would give birth to the seed, and yes she would give birth to the seed that would eventually be the Redeemer. The woman is called to be a life giver in every relationship, in every situation, in every season of her life.

But it is not natural to our sinful nature to be a life giver. It is natural because of our selfishness and because of the influence of culture to be life takers. When a woman says to her children, “So sorry your dad is so strict. I'll try to talk to him.” Do you see she is not defending her husband's reputation in that situation? She is being a life taker in that home. When women complain about decisions of church leadership, they are being life takers. Rather than defending the leaders of their church and supporting their leaders, they are being life takers rather than life givers.

God gives us the Holy Spirit to empower and to motivate us to be life givers, and He has given us His church to disciple us. Jesus said that we are to make disciples teaching them to obey everything He has said; and one of the very things He has said are the principles of biblical womanhood. He gave us a strategy in Titus 2 when He says that older women are to train younger women in these principles. Our privilege is to disciple young women to be life givers.

What does a life giver look like?

Scripture is replete with examples. Turn with me to 1 Samuel 1. The book of Judges ends with these ominous words. “In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” And then begins a transition with the book of Samuel to a new social order when God would install a king in Israel.

This mega moment in the unfolding story of redemption hinges on Hannah. An obscure, barren woman. But you see in God's economy He chooses what is foolish to shame the wise. He chooses what is weak to shame the strong. He chooses the obscure to be culture shapers.

One commentator calls Hannah the most pious woman in the OT. Her relationships show us what it looks like to be a life giver. The book of Samuel begins ch. 1. “There was a certain man whose name is Elkanah”, verse 2 “He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah. And the name of the other was Penninah. And Penninah had children. But Hannah had no children.”

The narrative goes on to tell us that this family traveled to Shiloh each year to make sacrifices, and that when they were there Elkanah would give double portions of food to Hannah because he loved her though the Lord had closed her womb.

And then in verse 6, “And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her because the Lord had closed her womb. So it went on year after year as often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her; therefore, Hannah wept and would not eat.”

Hannah means gracious woman and indeed she was. Her heart was broken, but there is no evidence here that she retaliated toward her rival. She is an illustration of Proverbs 19:11 that it is to our glory to overlook an offense.

Penninah was a life taker in that home but Hannah was a life giver. This went on year after year after year, but I think the clue to her character is seen in that twice repeated phrase “the Lord had closed her womb”. I think we are being told that Hannah clung to the sovereignty of God in this situation. Rather than being worn down by her rival's irritations, Hannah was strengthened because she had to go deep and deep and deeper into the sovereignty of God.

Then we see her relationship with her husband in verses 8 and 9. He said to her, “Why do you weep, and why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons? He really did love her. And he really meant well, but he just didn't get it. But Hannah did not attack him. Perhaps she had learned from an earlier woman in Israel who had failed to bear children.

You remember Sarah when she failed to bear children. She finally concocted a plan whereby she gave her maidservant to Abraham; but, when things got dicy and the servant became pregnant, Sarah said to Abraham, “May the wrong done to me be on you.” In other words, she is saying, “You did what I told you to do, but it's all your fault.”

Abraham throws up his hands and says, “Take it; whatever... do whatever you want to with her.” Sarah lost her grip for moment on God's sovereignty. And for that moment she became a life taker. Perhaps Hannah had learned from that. But Hannah listened to her husband's gentle rebuke. She ate and she went to the temple to pray.

Then she meets her preacher, and we see the relationship there. She has prayed fervently and silently, and Eli takes her to be a drunken woman and Eli says to her in verse 14, “How long will you go on being drunk? Put away your wine from you.” This was a serious allegation. Hannah could have caused mayhem in that community and in that church if she had run out and gathered all her friends and told them what the preacher had said. But her reaction to this injustice is really stunning.

Verse 15, “No my Lord. I'm a woman troubled in spirit. I've drunk neither wine nor strong drink. But I've been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman for all along I've been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation.” Hannah stated her case with great dignity and great clarity but also with great humility and great respect.

She addressed him as “my lord” and she referred to herself as “his servant”. In that context of her being a life giver, he was not backed against the wall; and Eli recovers well. To his credit, he gives her a blessing. “Go in peace and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to Him.”

Hanna's prayer is answered in v. 20. “In due time, Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she

called him Samuel for she said I have asked of him from the Lord.” When Samuel is weaned, she fulfills her vow and gives him to the Lord's service.

It's very interesting that Hannah had made a vow and now that she keeps it. A woman in the Old Testament could make a vow, but her husband could nullify it. This was a very radical vow. But, her husband did not nullify it showing the trust that he had in her. Just as we read with the Proverbs 31 woman, “the heart of her husband trusts in her.” It takes years to build this kind of trust. It takes year after year after year.

Hannah was a remarkable woman; but, if we stop here we will be simply moralizing Scripture. Yes, she was a remarkable woman and this is a stunning example of a life giver. But this is just the backdrop of the real story. Hannah's prayers show us what empowered and motivated her to be a life giver.

In 1 Samuel 1:11, we read her petition, “O Lord of Hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant but will give to your servant a son then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life and no razor shall touch his head.” Hannah was a life giver because she was a recipient of God's grace. I say that because of the title she used in approaching God --- “LORD of Hosts”.

This is the first time this title is used in Scripture. The name LORD of course had been used. This is the Hebrew word YHWH by which God reveals Himself to us as a personal God of covenant faithfulness who binds Himself to His people in covenant loyalty. It encompasses that wonderful covenant promise: I will be your God. You will be my people. I will dwell among you --- sovereign, seamless grace.

Hannah knew Him in this intimate way. But here she adds “the LORD of Hosts”. This is a military term. Referring to a host of armies signifying God's sovereignty over the powers of heaven and earth. His name *Yahweh* told Hannah how much He loved her. And the name *hosts* tells us of His sovereignty by which He is able to bring about His will for her.

In this petition, three times she identifies herself as His servant. “I am the Lord's servant,” she is showing us she has submitted herself to His authority.

And then her prayer in ch. 2. After she fulfills her vow and gives her son to the Lord's service, she prays a theologically rich prayer. This is a rich prayer of praise. It shows us that she knew God's word and she knew His character. What shaped her life is what shaped her prayers.

Verse 1 “and Hannah prayed saying, 'My heart exalts in the Lord. My strength is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in Your salvation. There is none holy like the Lord. There is none besides You. There is no rock like our God.' ” Hannah's joy is not in the gift that she received. Ultimately, Hannah's joy is in the Giver of the gift. This would have been Hannah's prayer even if she had not received the gift of a child. In fact, this shows us Hannah's character enabled her year after year after year to be a life giver; she knew God.

The personal pronouns we see all through these opening verses show us that personal relationship she had with Him. But in verse 2 she says, “There is no rock like *our* God.” Hannah also saw herself as part of the covenant community. She saw herself as part of the company of redeemed throughout the ages.

Then she reaches back to the Torah to praise God to describe His character. First of all, she praises Him for His holiness. "There is none holy like the Lord." Dr. Sproul told us earlier of men who were intoxicated with the majesty of God. Here is a woman who was. She is absolutely enthralled with the character, with the nature of God: "There is none holy like our God." She praises Him for His uniqueness: "There is no God like you." She praises Him as our Rock; the Rock is Jesus, and it is only when God has hidden us in Christ that we can begin to see the majesty of God.

In v. 3-5, we see that Hannah's confidence is in the sovereignty of God who is the reverser of circumstances. She says those who were full have hired themselves out, those who ...6-9 authority ...9-10 astonishing conclusion in v.10 "the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces..." What hope! --- Hannah's prophecy looks to David, yes, whom her son will anoint, but it looks beyond David to the kingdom of Christ.

The life of a life giver points to Jesus the Giver of life --- always. When we do not point to Jesus, we will be life takers. Hannah was a life giver because of Jesus. But whichever we are, whether a life giver or a life taker, we pass that legacy on. Hannah did. Her life giving legacy passed from generation to generation. The themes of her prayers are seen all the way through the books of 1 and 2 Samuel.

And those themes traveled down, down through the generations right to the village of Nazareth to a young woman named Mary when she was told that she would be the mother of the Messiah identified herself as a servant. "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word." Had she been disciplined by the story of Hannah? I rather think so because Mary's song, her Magnificat, is strikingly similar to Hannah's song.

The college woman asked me, "How can I think biblically about my womanhood?" At another conference, a woman said, "I've been married for 25 years, and I have been a life taker for 25 years. Deep down in my heart I knew it, but when I heard that description of the life giver and the life taker, I had to admit it. The legacy that I have given to my daughters is the legacy of a life taker. Is it too late for me?"

The good news of the Gospel is: it is never too late. The Gospel is the power to transform us from life takers to life givers. Our God is the Redeemer of our failures. He is the Reverser of our legacies.

But those two women, the college student and this woman who said I have been a life taker, forced me to ask myself and I hope will force you to ask yourself, "Is my church equipping women to be life givers? Is my church equipping women to give the legacy of redeemed womanhood to the next generation for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom?"