

Anna Porter was born Anna Szigethy in Budapest, Hungary. Her family fled following the failed revolution against communism in 1956. They first settled in New Zealand, where she went to school at the University of Canterbury. She was always interested in books and publishing especially after experiencing the repression on literature under the communist regime. Eventually, she moved to Canada. Here she founded Key Porter Books and then purchased a majority stake in publisher Double Day Canada. She is one of the most respected publishing professionals in Canada. But she has stepped away from publishing so she can focus on writing.

In her most recent book, *The Ghosts of Europe*, she examines the transition from communism to democracy in Central Europe. She looks at four nations – Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and her native Hungary. I think she has a very unique perspective in that she has lived under communism and lived in democracies. She of course points out the tyranny of communist rule and the joy & hope that filled those nations when the communist system collapsed.

But once that freedom was obtained, everything did not go well. Each nation faced significant challenges. This might surprise those of us from North America because we can easily assume that the greatest thing that could ever happen to a country was freedom from tyranny and adoption of democracy. Or we might think the greatest blessing for any people is to adopt and embrace a system exactly like ours. But Anna, as somewhat of an outsider, brings a very different perspective.

She is deeply concerned that these nations in central Europe who have tried so hard to be like us have lost their soul in doing so. She talks of one Polish philosopher who took good and evil very seriously including the reality of the devil. But once they had won power something was over. As they adopted western values they adopted western moral relativism. She writes *“The mindless pursuits of the West leave little time for reflection. Questions of good and evil are no longer of vital interest to the public and in an era of moral relativism, an era that wishes to be inclusive of many points of view, the devil is just another player.”* Do you hear what she’s saying? She’s observed that people in those countries have become so absorbed with mindless pursuits that they have little time to think about what’s really important. Where did they discover these mindless pursuits? From us. We can become so consumed with pursuing trivial and

meaningless endeavors that we have no energy left to invest in others or the needs outside of the outside world. Or we don't even consider good and evil and the need to fight for good.

Is she overstating it? Maybe. But might it be true that we're invited to spend much time in our culture on things that ultimately don't matter? I was talking with a group of friends one time. We were discussing ministry, parenting and different challenges our kids faced. One father talked about he and his wife struggling with the amount of time their son spent gaming. Someone asked how much time the son spends gaming – 4-6 hours/day. This was during the school year. 4-6 hours a day – Lets take the low number of that total – 4 hours a day – times 7. That's 28 waking hours/week. For what – to maybe share with a friend that you reached level 150 on that game?

We can follow the same pattern with our phones or devices or TV. Could you turn off your phone or device or TV or computer for week? My oldest daughter Courtney is at Camp Caroline serving as a summer counselor. Upon arrival, she misplaced her phone and did not have it for one complete week. We were talking back and forth about whether or not we should suspend her phone. Listen to this little statement which I found so interesting – She writes *So suspending it would be a great idea...I'll keep you posted (however it is super refreshing and nice not to be checking and have it at all) weird but nice!* Could it be that our phones and connections go too far and become a tyranny of a different kind that lead us to engage in a mindless pursuit of always having to check our phone?

We can stay up so late that there is little or no energy to pray; think; react; respond and engage with the world. We can be like rivers – who always look for the easiest path in life. So when we hear Jesus command that we shall be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, we politely applaud those who actually engage and then head back to our self-absorbed lives. If we stay there – there will be no room for risk for the kingdom; no willingness to be inconvenienced or have our timetables or goals interrupted. There will be no openness to the Lordship of Christ over every part of our lives. There will be no evangelism or missions. Lest we think – well I'm going to get serious about Jesus intently someday.

Jesus does not give us an option about whether or not we want to follow Him. Notice the quote from Jesus on the front page of the bulletin. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life (keep it for himself, be so self-absorbed that you have no time or energy for others) will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

To live out this high calling, we must make an intentional and deliberate choice to “Set aside North American Self Absorption and instead live out the mission Christ gave us.” If we don’t make some intentional choices, we will more than likely just go with the flow. But we can take some deliberate steps away from mindless pursuits and practices of self-absorption, then there is hope for a meaningful life that actively engages in what’s most important in this world – loving God and loving others especially with His message of hope.

Today concludes a kind of scattered series of messages that have focused on the question **How can we pursue intentional discipleship and disciple making under Christ?**

We’ve already done 5 of these listed in your bulletin. And I know that you may have missed some of these over the past weeks. So we have produced some CD’s with these 5 messages on them that you can take with you and listen to or review over the summer. These will help us further dive into our focus on much more intentional focus on growing as disciples and disciple makers of Jesus Christ. Today is the final message on this that I’ve entitled “Set aside North American Self Absorption. But what are we supposed to pursue? What is this mission Jesus gives us? We find it in several places throughout the New Testament. But our text today contains one of his clearest calls to mission. We’re first going to look at how Jesus defines the mission. Then consider ways we can begin living out this mission more fully than we might currently be doing.

Acts 1:1-8

English Standard Version (ESV)

**1** In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,<sup>2</sup> until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

<sup>4</sup> And while staying<sup>[a]</sup> with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; <sup>5</sup> for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with<sup>[b]</sup> the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

<sup>6</sup> So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” <sup>7</sup> He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Luke wrote the book of Acts. He wrote the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gospel called Luke for a man named Theophilus. The Gospels describe Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection. But what would happen after Jesus' time on Earth was done? How would the ministry of Jesus and God's redemptive plan continue in Jesus' physical absence? The book of Acts explains and shows how things would continue. In its first few verses, we discover our calling from Jesus Himself.

Luke begins by addressing the same person he wrote to in his gospel - some dude named Theophilus. If you look at the opening verses of Luke's Gospel, you will find a reference to "most excellent Theophilus." (1:3) We think he was some sort of Greek of high standing because you didn't just call anyone "most excellent." Yet whatever his position, he had an interesting name – Theophilus – Phileo is one word for love in Greek and Theos is God. So Theophilus means lover of God. To this lover of God, and to us lovers of God hopefully, Luke writes. And back in Acts 1 he references the first book or the Gospel in which he dealt with Jesus' life and teaching. But notice how he references Jesus' life in verse 1 – "I have dealt with all that Jesus BEGAN to do and teach." Jesus life and ministry on earth was only the beginning of His ministry.

It would continue after his departure and continues to this very day. But how would it continue and through whom and by what power? Well Jesus equipped the apostles whom he had chosen. He taught them and gave them commands in verse 2. He assured them that He really did rise by presenting himself many times to them after His resurrection. And He would not leave them alone. He commanded them to stay in Jerusalem until they would receive this power from God called the Holy Spirit.

Then it's time for Jesus to leave. So they assemble for his departure and someone asks "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" They still couldn't let go of the idea that the Messiah's mission had to include restoring the nation of Israel to a position of power and strength. Jesus responds that it is not for them to know times or dates the Father has determined. But while they waited for those times and dates, there was something that would keep them busy.

Here we discover the answer to the question "What are we supposed to be doing as followers as Christ?" Acts 1:8 – "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Followers of Jesus Christ - here's our mission. In the power of the

Holy Spirit, bear witness to Jesus Christ in your neighborhoods, in St. Albert and Edmonton, in Alberta and Canada and to the ends of the earth to other people groups.

Now the apostles had to wait for the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. That comes in Acts 2, just a few verses later. But if you're a Christian, you already received the Holy Spirit. By the Spirit's power, we are all commanded by Jesus to be His witnesses.

So what does it mean to be a witness of Jesus? Basically, a witness tells what he or she has seen and heard. A witness of Jesus tells others about who Jesus is, what He has done and what He continues to do today. A witness brings the good news that Jesus has paid for our sin so we can be reconciled with God and experience this new life in Christ.

But witnesses don't only tell others about Christ. They live lives changed by Christ. Mike Lueken writes *"If Jesus is who he claims to be, and we are his followers, it stands to reason that we should be living a new kind of life. We will not share what we do not have. It is hard to sustain our motivation to witness to the richness of life in God's kingdom when we are not living in it and seeing the difference it makes."* So friends – here's a little test to examine ourselves and our walk with God.

**How is your life different from the people around you who aren't Christians? In your family - at work – at school – in the community – on the team?** Would non-Christians notice some differences or would they conclude that you're pretty much like them? I think this is a challenge many of us face because we all like to fit in or not be different than others to some degree. Maybe you can think of a time in your life when you were very obviously different than others. Do you remember how that felt?

I went to Cameroon, West Africa in the early 1990's to show the Jesus' film. Our group was divided up into teams of 4 white people or North Americans and two Cameroonians who would translate and guide us. We would take a film projector, bed sheet for a movie screen and a gas generator so we could show the movie anywhere independent of a power supply. Our strategy was to arrive several hours prior to the film. Then we would go throughout the villages with little sheets of paper inviting people to attend the evening's film showing.

I'll never forget going to one village. Along with one of the Cameroonians, I walked down the main street handing out these paper invites. I was the only white face on that entire street. Some people stopped what they were doing to look up at this unusual person. Some called others in their house to come and look. Children pointed and laughed. It

was one of the times I have experienced being a minority – I was different and it was strange. One of these things was not like the other – it was me. But good – it was an opportunity to use the curiosity generated by the color of my skin for the purposes of Jesus

But here it's harder. If you're white, people are not going to stop on the streets of St. Albert and look at you. But will those closest to you notice something different about the way we speak or dress; the way we do our work or conduct ourselves in school or at the office because of your walk with Christ? Will they notice anything different about how we drive or what we have in our homes? Will they see an illegal outlet for cable that we're not paying for? Will they see us cheat on tests? Will they conclude we are as self absorbed with our hobbies, homes and holidays as much as everyone else so that there is nothing much different about these Christians?

Or will they see a people willing to stop when help is needed; interrupt their schedules when someone needs prayer. Will they see people who open their homes in hospitality and share what they have? Will they discover someone who has time for them? Will they find someone who thinks about, gives and act on behalf of others? Do we act like a people who are deeply convinced about everyone's need for God and deeply concerned about their neighbors on the path to Hell?

You might be saying "yes" to a lot of this. But you also might be wondering why we are now emphasizing discipleship so much. What does that have to do with being Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the Earth?

If we are not in personal relationship with the Lord and following Him with ever increasing joy and passion, then we will not invite and call others to do the same. We will not offer what we do not experience.

It is not easy being a witness for Jesus. We can't just decide "I'm going to be a witness for Christ to the end of the earth" and everything will fall into place. We need help. Jesus proclaimed "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you AND you will be my witnesses .

We need the Holy Spirit's empowering to actually follow through on this. But we can't be witnesses in isolation from some of the basics of discipleship. Mike Lueken says that if we don't connect our own need for discipleship or growing in Christ with our evangelism and missions, we will end up with 3 separate groups in the church. There will be one group that will be talking about missions, missions, missions. We should be doing more missions. Why aren't we doing more missions? Why aren't you people doing more in missions. Then there will be another group that says

evangelism, evangelism, evangelism. Why aren't we doing more in evangelism? Why aren't you more passionate about evangelism? Then there might be another group saying prayer, prayer, prayer – or Bible Study, Bible Study. Why aren't you other people doing more prayer or Bible Study? Lueken writes “When formation, mission and evangelism become independent departments, they drift toward legalistic obligation, become the hobbyhorse of a few and lose their momentum.”

I'm saying as a pastor “Yes to all of those in an interconnected way through our discipleship and disciple making focus.” Remember our focus since March 2? Every Christian is called to become a disciple of Jesus – one who is growing to become more and more like Jesus. AND a disciple maker.

Say a Christian grows as a disciple of Jesus Christ through a personal relationship with God empowered by the Holy Spirit; through interacting with God by reading and meditating on His Word; through talking to God in prayer; in worshiping God on Sundays and throughout the week; in persevering with God by connecting with other Christians to keep going in the faith; in discovering what holiness looks like and the ways the Spirit empowers us to overcome sin and the devil; through growing and equipping our minds by cultivating a Christian world view. What will flow from that Christian? They will gain God's heart for the lost and look for opportunities to share the Gospel with the hopeless. They will give and serve others with the Love of Christ. They will hear Jesus command to go into the world and make disciples. So they will go themselves or cut back some area of spending in their lives so they can support others who go. They will put aside the mindless pursuits of the west and invest their energies in God's projects that have eternal lasting impact – not 10 seconds that it takes to communicate “I made level 150.”

Discipleship leads to disciple-making which shows itself in generosity, serving, giving, evangelism and missions. Many of you are already doing this in the power of the Spirit. I want to encourage to keep going – to keep fighting the good fight – to keep on with that ministry – to keep meeting with your mentoring partner – to keep sacrificing financially so that child in Honduras can have hope. Keep working through our prayer list and ask the Holy Spirit to empower us as a people to be Jesus' witnesses.

We've got mission's opportunities this summer – VBS is one week away. It's full and overflowing with kids – many from the community. We need more helpers. So I don't know what it would take for you to reschedule or adjust what

you have planned for July 7-11 but we need you to do it. We have youth mission's trips coming up this summer. Some of our missionaries will be visiting us this summer and in the Fall.

Yet each one of us is called to be a witness for Christ. How can we start or keep going on this?

So how will we respond?

1 – Ask to be continually filled with the Spirit specifically to bear witness to Christ.

2 – Cut back or discontinue some unnecessary expenditure – give the proceeds to missions or someone in need.

3 – Pray for your neighbors. Some of us here might struggle with contempt for our neighbors. We may have seen the poverty in the third world or some of the great needs of orphans or people who have nothing. So we have no problem helping them or giving to some organization that helps there. But when we see our neighbors or other people in St. Albert, we silently despise them. They're rich. They've got a nice house or a good retirement plan or a nice car or great opportunity. They'll get there's on judgment day.

Maybe we need to ask God to help us see our neighborhoods and the people that live there through His eyes. We need Him to strip away what's behind the neatly trimmed lawns, 3 car garages and beautiful cars. To help us do this, I want us to go on 2 prayer walks this summer in our community – need volunteers for each community.

I would like a little group from Sturgeon Valley to go around every neighborhood in St. Albert and do a little prayer walk. By prayer walking, I mean we simply walk together through a neighborhood and ask the Lord to help us see our neighbors as He sees Him.

So I need someone from each of our neighborhoods to do something very simple on our 2 prayer walk evenings. You simply invite people from your community that are part of Sturgeon Valley to meet at your house. Then from your house you go and walk and pray.

Akinsdale, Braeside, Campbell, Deer Ridge, Erin Ridge, Forest Lawn, Grandin, Heritage Lakes, Ironwood, J, Kingswood, Lacombe Park, Mission, North Ridge, Oakmont, Pinewood, Q, Riel – Riverside, Sturgeon, T, U, V, Woodlands, X, Y, Z. If you don't live in St. Albert, you can join one of the St. Albert groups those evenings. Or you can do it in your community – so in Morinville – or in Edmonton. Or maybe you're a senior and live in a senior's residence. You can prayer walk your residence. Or students you can go to the school you'll be attending in the fall and prayer walk around

it. It will also be a way for us to connect with people in our community who also attend our church. Wednesday, July 16; Wednesday, Aug 20

Lueken writes – “We live at such a frantic pace that we stop noticing the actual people in the communities where we live. We found that a good old-fashioned prayer walk was a great help at slowing us down and helping us “see” our neighbors as people who need God. Praying helps deconstruct the façade of a well-manicured lawn and nice house. It reduces the artificiality of suburbia. It reminds us that no matter how perfect things may look on the outside, people still need God.” It can be one way we set aside North American Self Absorption and instead pursue missions. Will you set aside some time those evenings to join with others from our church to walk and pray for your neighborhoods? There’s a little sheet of paper in the bulletin that I’d like to invite you to fill out and bring to the front in a moment.

Finally, I do need to bear witness to Christ today for anyone here that does not know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Jesus came, lived and died so that you might be reconciled to God. Jesus suffered on the cross to take the penalty for your sins onto Himself. If you would turn from loving those sins to loving Him; and if you would stop trusting in your own efforts to earn favor with God and instead put all your trust upon Jesus and what He has done, God will save you. God will come into you. You will receive the Holy Spirit and begin the journey of following Christ, losing your old life yet gaining new life in Him. Will you turn to Him during our time of prayer now?