



Season 10: Episode 8 | Anne Miranda | Is Biblical Illiteracy Real?

Hello and welcome to Scripture Untangled, a podcast by the Canadian Bible Society. My name is Joanna la Fleur. I'm a friend of the Canadian Bible Society and I'm going to be your guide for today's episode.

Today I have the privilege of interviewing Anne Miranda. Anne Miranda is a leader of leaders with a background in education. Anne speaks and trains teams around the world as she inspires people to rise up and lead in their own spheres of influence, whether in boardrooms, classrooms, or ministry settings.

Anne's contagious passion for Jesus helps equip people to find their own passion. Anne is currently the pastor of women and young families at Peace Portal Church in South Surrey, British Columbia. Anne's experiences include being a high school English and Spanish teacher and working with the Attorney General's office leading initiatives for crime and violence prevention for youth in British Columbia.

She's an ambassador for Ally Global, passionately promoting this organization that focuses on empowering women and children who have been rescued from sex trafficking. For fun, you'll find Anne baking up a storm or exploring a new cafe with her husband Carlos. Out of the office, you might hear her crazy cheering for her kids Nathaniel and Hannah at their fun events and sports, and you will certainly laugh at her attempt to train Lucy the golden doodle and enjoy documenting her Lebanese mother's hilarious perspective on life for Instagram.

So, I hope you enjoyed this conversation with Anne Miranda.

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Joanna la Fleur: Anne Miranda, welcome to Scripture Untangled.

We're really glad to have you on the podcast.

Anne Miranda: I am so happy to be here. Hello, my friend.

Joanna la Fleur: Hello, my friend across the country. We're joining you. It looks like in your living room, if people are on the video version of this audio podcast, and we've just heard an introduction on you, but I want to start here in this piece because I enjoy watching your Lebanese mom on social media, or the view from her eyes as a, you know, an immigrant to Canada and her view on life and Canadian culture and language.

But of course, you have your own Lebanese heritage as part of your story, and I'd love to understand how that has shaped you, because I think a lot of people listening might be first or second generation immigrants themselves. How does that shape your view as a Canadian Christian?

Anne Miranda: Yeah, so fun. Yes, I love to document my mom, just the day-to-day.

She doesn't actually know how funny she is, and so that makes it even funnier for us that are close to her, and I didn't realize how much other people would also be entertained by all the shenanigans. And so now she says this thing, "you have the video, you have the video camera, take it away." But I'm like, no, people need to see this.

And so, I forced her to do like cooking with me and fun stuff like that. It's been fun to document that. But really growing up as a Lebanese Canadian, I've lived all across Canada.

My parents immigrated to different parts of Canada, and I was born in Ottawa, then my childhood was in Edmonton, and as a teenager in Surrey, BC. So, kind of just like across the board. And I think growing up in a Lebanese home, because both of my parents were Lebanese and are Lebanese. My dad has now passed away.

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But I think part of that, it gave me a very different perspective on what is the norm? And so, for me, it was like, do I fit in Lebanese culture? Not fully, because I can't actually speak the language 100%. I can understand but speaking is difficult.

I don't read Arabic. And I don't fully fit in whatever we call a Canadian culture. That's so convoluted.

And that's a very packed question for me. And so where do I fit then? You know, I joke around about our lunches that my mom would pack. We would play games in school where they'd be like, guess what's in Ann's lunch? Because nowadays, Joanna, hummus and lentils are so trendy.

But back in the day, 30 years ago...

Joanna la Fleur: Not cool when you were growing up.

Anne Miranda: Not cool. "What is that? That looks like mush or poop or whatever..."

They would say funny things, but then as I grew through the years and into maturity, like stature and maturity, I think I wrestled with who is Jesus then in this context? I was very aware at a young age that someone had to die, aside from Jesus himself, a martyr had to die for me to have access to the name of Jesus. That was a gift, I think, to my upbringing. And somewhere along the way, that was very deep seated for me.

And then as a teenager, just like a lot really confusing again. But then as a young adult, coming back almost full circle and going, oh, this is my truth. And being part of a country that I'm not familiar with, because I grew up here in Canada, that is so war-torn over religious divide, very, very violent religious divide.

And so that's partly unfamiliar to me, but yet familiar in a strange way. My dad would always say, at the Christian table, you will find everyone. I'm like, what does that mean? He goes, you will find the Muslim, the Jew, the Christian, there's so many other sects and religions as well in the Middle East.

And so, he's like, but around a table that confesses the name of Jesus, you will find these people because we're unifiers. So, there were like some seeds planted in my

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childhood, although I didn't have a lively relationship with Jesus. There were very, I would say, seeds planted. Absolutely.

Joanna la Fleur: Well, and I think there's something of some of us listening who would appreciate that you have a link into some cultural context of the Bible that others may not. Like you have a closer link, although you've never grew up there, to some of the cultural dynamics, even like what was the food that Jesus, what was the hummus and pita that Jesus was eating back in his day? But more than that, there's some cultural context or how people gathered around a meal or who was invited to the table or conflicts amongst different sects that Jesus was addressing that you have a little bit of a connection to.

Do you find that as you're reading the Bible that there's some things, some stories that come to life in a way for you because you love to teach the Bible? So maybe there's stories that come to life for you in a way because of this rich heritage that you come from in a way that brings perspective, maybe people missed because they came from, again, some other cultural background.

Anne Miranda: Yeah.

Yeah. When I'm reading and I'm an English major, so there's a piece of that too, that the English lit, not the grammar and all that kind of piece, but it is part of the study.

When I'm reading Scripture, it's as if there's like a movie, a scene that's playing in my mind. And so, when I think of like the last supper, I'm actually picturing almost an aerial view of like what was on that table. There's definitely olives.

There's definitely pita. Like my mind is just wired almost in this through a Middle Eastern, but yet also Western lens. It's quite complicated.

And then when I think about, I was recently preaching on a passage where Jesus multiplies - Luke nine, Jesus multiplies the bread and the fish. And I said, what do you imagine when you read this? It, for me, I imagine it's barley loaves. It's like the bread my grandma would make.

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It's like a pita, but a little bit like, ...

Joanna la Fleur: This isn't a wonder bread or baguette. Yeah.

Anne Miranda: Yes.

It's not a baguette totally. It's not a croissant, but I love it. I haven't like ever since I came to know Jesus, like in a deeper relationship, I cannot “not” see Him as a Middle Eastern Jesus.

Like that's all I can add that I filter. That's my filter. And so, it's interesting because we bring our own biases to the text and how many times we could read Scripture and think of him not as a Middle Eastern.

Right. And so, I think that's definitely impacted my reading of Scripture and understanding of Scripture. For sure.

I can't disassociate myself from it. And it's, it feels rich to me.

Joanna la Fleur: And I love that because we're not asked to, you know, that we get to come to the text with who we are, our cultural background that Jesus demonstrated over and over in Scripture, in His stories, that whatever your culture, whatever your background, that it was all welcome at the table or in the conversation with Him that we don't have to somehow separate it.

But it brings that, I don't know, it brings those layers of insight and flavor.

Anne Miranda: There's another piece of this that I, to pull it away from food for a second, of like honor and shame culture. I understand, like to a depth that when I heard Daryl Johnson preach about the prodigal son, I was in tears because I thought, oh, this is the first time I think I've heard, this was years ago, but hearing a preacher preach of Middle Eastern Jesus too, in my context.

And I went, oh, I get that the shame that that son felt that the father took on that shame, because there are sayings in, and I know that the Scripture isn't written in like

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Arabic, but there's sayings that are like parents that see their kids and they say things like, I see myself in you. Right. I see myself in you.

And that, it sounds weird when it's translated, but it's a loaded meaning. Like you bear my image when you go out of this house, and you carry my image wherever you go. And so, there's this thing about the family reputation that we're like, we grow up with it.

Those are sayings our parents speak over us. And so, when I then read a passage like the prodigal son, or even God, like we are His image bearers. I'm like, oh, this has a different kind of significance to me.

And it's not burdensome. It's just like this revelation, almost like this light bulb moment that goes off because of the cultural experiences. It's just wild.

Joanna, it's fun to study like this.

Joanna la Fleur: Wow. I mean, it sounds like there's a whole, there's a whole book, a podcast, a preaching series somewhere in you around this issue about sort of through the eyes of Middle Eastern women, how do we view, what have we missed or what are some layers and depth that we would all gain if we understood some things that you see, and not again, not that you have to be the resident expert, but I could see you pulling together something so rich here, but okay.

And you are many things to me. You happen to be friend. I feel privileged to call you a friend, but you're also a teacher to me.

You've been educator, pastor, leader, really an activist for some justice issues. You're a mom and not just a mom, like the baseball sports mom that goes around with your, I know your son is in high performance baseball. But there's these many hats.

But talk to us about this idea of calling, because you didn't always work in church ministry. What is it, what would you define or how do you summarize your calling in life from God?

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Anne Miranda: There's this general calling. And I knew that from the minute that I was like dedicating my life fully to Jesus, that it was like, okay, you want me to serve your purposes, wherever I go, whatever I do, if that was in a classroom, or if that was sitting with somebody that was rescued out of trafficking, or if it was with a teenager, because as a high school teacher, and just listening to their story, there's this general, like, be my hands and feet and voice and love people well and care for people that are releasing into this world, the hope and the peace and the love that I've received.

And so, there's that piece. And sometimes we look for and we're searching for this, like deeper purpose. And I wonder if there are assignments, I like that word a lot, if there are assignments for different seasons.

And those are things that God's like, okay, this is the season for you to do this specific thing. And let's go. And it's in partnership with the Holy Spirit.

And so, I have found that as I have wrestled with those assignments to try to discern what is it now, God, what is it that You're asking of me in this season? It's been His Scripture, it's been the Word of God that has been the lamp unto my feet that has been like, okay, this is the way let's walk in this way. Let's complete this assignment. So, I'll give you an example of that when I was teaching.

And I was like, Lord, I don't understand, like, are You asking me to lead a small group? Or what is it that You'd like me to do? Like, am I actually going to completely pivot from this career and go into vocational ministry? It was His Word. I was reading His Word. And it's like, trust Me, don't lean on your own understanding.

Trust Me, you're going to take this risk, I'm going to push you out of your comfort zone. And this is the assignment. I mean, in that season, He gave me a dream.

Like, that was so real and tangible to me that this was what God was asking of me. This is the, that was that assignment in that season. And it was amazing.

And then, again, as I was serving faithfully in that time, it was like, okay, there was another kind of milestone or fork in the road kind of moment. Lord, again, is there a

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new assignment that You're asking me? And the same, it was the same thing. It was like, yes, I need You to release whatever it is.

This is finished now. It's kind of like when you do like homework in the classroom, you give an assignment and then there's a completion and then that's it. And then there's something else.

And so, I found myself more than like the calling, I guess, as I unpack it is what is it right now in this current assignment that I'm in? I want to share with you that there's something that happened. I don't know if I share this story with you as my friend, but it was about a year, two years ago now, where I really hit a massive fork in the road. And I said, Lord, I think that I've been serving you with all my heart, my soul, and where there's been great things that I've seen and witnessed.

And I got three different phone calls on my ride home from Vancouver to Surrey. And it was like about an hour ride, hour and a half of bad traffic, three different phone calls, three different people who don't even know each other called me with the same parable of the talents. And I just feel like I should share this with you.

And I'm like, what is Your Word speaking to me? By the third one, I'm in tears. I'm driving home. I'm like, what are you trying to tell me? Because I believe God speaks through His Word.

And He's speaking to me. I can sense His presence through this word. And he said, what talents? I said to Him first, I said, are you telling me that I've hidden my talents? Like I've just buried them.

And I did not hear an audible voice, but I sensed through the Scriptures, it was like, well, you tell me, you tell me if you, if you've hidden your talents. And I said, what is, that was the time I was wrestling with a calling. I was like, what am I supposed to, what are these talents that I have buried? And three things were made clear.

I need to communicate God's Word and be in spaces where I can do that. I need to empower other women in leadership and come alongside women, whatever roles or positions there's places that they are in or would like to be in to come alongside or

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create spaces for other women who are leading, just to safe spaces where we can communicate and process together. And the third was shepherd My people.

It was like one of those Peter moments, like feed My people, lead My people, be with My people. And that was my, another pivot moment to go into the local church once again and occupy a new assignment.

Joanna la Fleur: So, I mean, what you're describing, even in this, like three people calling you with essentially the same Bible passage, talk about God trying to get your attention.

And I mean, at the Bible Society, Canadian Bible Society, there's this phrase, we talk about, *We help people hear God speak*. And somebody listening today might be saying like, that's never happened to me, that three people have called me with the same Bible verse. So, you know, am I doing something wrong? You know, why, but more than that, at its most basic, the question is like, could you give us some handles to grab onto of how do we hear God speak? You know, what does that, at least what does that look like for you and your experience? Other than like three people calling you sounds like it's a megaphone trying to get your attention, but I would imagine most of the time, it isn't that direct and obvious.

So, what are some ways that you're seeing you hear God speak to you over your life?

Anne Miranda: So, one of my passions, especially this year is leaning into the ordinary, hearing God in the ordinary, the everyday chores, whatever it is that I'm doing. Um, and so ways that I hear Him is like, I believe His Word speaks. So, I need to read it to hear Him speak to me.

And so that's part of my experience, just creating a space so that I have time to read. Otherwise, my time is going to be filled with everything else, all the other things of life. And so, I'm reading it.

I'm hearing it through an audio version. If, I'm on a walk or also there's so many amazing songs that sing, I just want to get it into my being. And so that's how God speaks to me.

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He speaks to me through other people. And so, I've actually in this season set up time aside with a friend to study God's Word together. And then we kind of, we go back and forth and say, what's God talking to me about? What God's talking to me about? What do you think this word means for each other? And so that's been a really neat experience.

I hadn't done that in such like intimacy with someone for a long, long time. And so that's, those are ways that God speaks to me.

Joanna la Fleur: Hmm.

And you talk about that with the Bible. I don't know that everybody has that kind of relationship with Scripture, maybe even, hunger for it in this way that you're pursuing it. You're trying to get it in your eyeballs, your ears, in your mouth, you know, as you're in discussion and studying with other people or on your own, or you're singing it out.

How did, do you remember a time? Cause there sounds like there's a bit of a before and after, at least early in your life. Like when the Bible and your faith became real or powerful to you, because maybe it would be an encouragement for people to say like, did it happen in a moment? Has this grown as you've matured, this interest or hunger for Scripture? Cause I think a lot of people find it really hard to get into in the first place.

Anne Miranda: So, when I have this like very clear 19 years old and at a church for the, um, in, in an experience that I've never had before encountering a very tangible encounter with the presence of God.

And in that moment, realizing Jesus, I want, I need to give my life to You. I need to surrender my life to you. My desires, my plans.

Here I am. And I had no Biblical knowledge. What I did have was, and I call it an encounter because it was kind of like the soul on a journey.

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And then an interruption. I say the super interrupted my natural, that supernatural collision that happened on that day. Um, and in that moment, I realized that there was a massive shift that I couldn't live my life the way that I was living it. Um, and now I wanted to be, we teach a little, little kids in Sunday school.

I wanted Jesus to be the boss of my life. And that's a real thing. I wanted him to be Lord of my life.

So, I was studying in university at that time as an English major. And my specialty or focus is Shakespeare. So, I pick up a King James version for New King James after, which is hilarious for those that are listening.

It is like, well, it's like older English. It's not dense. It's a dense translation.

I didn't know any other version. I didn't know anything else. Right.

And it's just very elementary. And I thought if I could study Shakespeare, I can study this. I can figure this out.

And that's where the appetite started because I had encountered, but I didn't have like knowledge. I didn't have the heart. And I knew that I was like forming like my allegiance as pledging my allegiance to Jesus.

And I just wanted Him to, I wanted to learn about what does the Kingdom of Heaven mean? I wanted to learn about all of His ways. And if this is The Way, The Truth, and the Life, I wanted to know it, but what is it? And so that's where my study began. Okay.

So later, like a year or so after I realized, oh, there's different versions of the Bible. And a lot of my initial study was on my own. I didn't actually have community either at that in that stage.

And it wasn't probably until about five years in, into going to church by myself, just being part of a church community, trying to build friendships. And then there was like group study that I knew that that was, oh, Bible study. What was that? Oh, we could do this together in a community.

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We could learn together and very swiftly because like naturally gifting is teaching. I found myself in spaces where now I was learning it and teaching, with kids, with youth, and eventually with women and in church settings. So, it was a gradual process, but my hunger, my appetite, all of that was because I never had access to it.

I didn't know that I could. I didn't even think that I could or should or would read the Scriptures. That was just, it was just wild to me.

Joanna la Fleur: Well, can we talk about that? I want to move into, you know, your idea of your sense of calling, particularly with women and empowering women in the church. And so maybe this is a tie to both. You could speak specifically about women, but I'm sure it's true of men too, around this idea of what I call Biblical illiteracy.

This idea of people who might be around church, around Christian things, even around the Bible, but know so little of it for themselves or don't know how the stories connect from, from the beginning to end of the Bible. And it sounds like you went on a journey to become and to self-educate and then, you know, to jump in with other people, but maybe talk to us like the pastor, because you're saying we have to know it to hear God speak to us, but a lot of people don't know it.

And so, I'm not asking this question about, please guilt everyone who's listening to us. That's not my, my intention. But as a pastor, where does this concern you with the people that you're leading or what is it that you think people get and where are the gaps that are concerning to you?

Anne Miranda: So, I spend a lot of my time creating, whether it's a study or in spaces to study for people to understand Scripture in just easy ways, ways that feel relatable.

It's like telling story. That's what Jesus did is through parable so that people can grasp it and not feel like, oh, this is so old or ancient, doesn't apply to me now, or I just don't understand it. It's just too much.

So, trying to break it down. So, what I'm noticing in a generation is that there is this Biblical illiteracy because we're not familiar. This is not about being, there was a season where the generations, maybe my, and I'm ahead of like in their fifties and

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sixties, it may be have a little bit of knowledge of God and fallen away, or that's very Christianese, but have had a root or a base, a foundation of Christianity and then chose, oh no, church or institution is not for me.

And so, then I'm going to, I'm not going to dedicate my life to that, but there was still a foundation. There was still like, if you ask that generation, who's Moses, who's Abraham, Mary, Joseph, like some just basics, the golden rule, like these kinds of things, they would have had verbiage or understanding because maybe they would have grown up in church or something that... this generation not, it is fully, it is so different. It is so foreign.

It is like teaching a second language. And I was a second language teacher. I was a Spanish teacher.

And it's like teaching from scratch, a base that is non-existent. So let me give you an example. I was teaching in a mom's group, and I was talking about moms of the Bible.

That's what they wanted me to teach about. So, I chose Moses's mom and the Pharaoh's daughter. And I'm talking about these two women who are mamas to Moses and how they formed him and all this.

I'm just going out. I'm just talking about their story. And this girl lifts up her hand and she looks at me and she's like, I have a question.

I was like, yes, go for it. And she's like, is there like a political issue that's happening here? Like what are the Jews and the Egyptians even, what is that? And I was like, oh, and she's like, and what is like, who is Moses? Why is he important? Like, it's just like, oh, I know this. I'm also like the evangelist in my context.

And I love, you know, leading people to Jesus and I'm very aware. And in this moment, I looked at her and I said, who else in this room is a little bit confused right now? And I just saw the blank faces. And I went, okay.

And I moved into, instead of teaching about the context into a history lesson and then move back into the teaching. But that's what I'm talking about. Families that are

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learning Scripture alongside their children, they're drawn to Christianity because it's good.

And it's got some good things for our kids and good values. And that Jesus guy, oh, maybe, maybe we'll believe in Him. Maybe.

But if the kids do, that's okay. It's strange, Joanna. It's strange.

What we're seeing and what we're witnessing, and we're not the only church in our neighborhood that is witnessing this. And so, part of that Biblical illiteracy, where do we even begin? What kind of academy do we create so that we learn? Where are the spiritual, I'm going to say, mothers and fathers of the generations that have gone before us that have the Scripture, that know it. How can we pass that on as part of our legacy of coming alongside people that really don't have any context? And so that's what I'm really interested in, in this season of my life.

It's just creating spaces that Scripture is easily understood. Let's untangle it together, because it feels like a big tangle. It feels burdensome to so many people, but I've seen the hunger with my own eyes in these people's lives, confessing, I just want to know.

I want to know. Again, I've had encounter, but I need this knowledge piece. And so how do I reconcile those two in my world?

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That's Bible Course . c a, and the link will be down in the show notes.

Joanna la Fleur: Yes. Well, and I love what you're saying about this analogy of like teaching a second language, because for those of us who maybe grew up in a church context, some amount of our listeners have that experience and some don't.

They're like adults trying to catch up. It feels like they're in season three of the show and they're trying to catch up with what everybody else around them in the church is talking about. But for those who started at season, what you know, started from, you know, cradle Christians, we could say cradle Catholics, cradle Christians.

It's a helpful analogy to kind of feel even just compassion, like learning a second language is difficult and takes years. And the best way is immersion. You can sit; you have to immerse yourself in the language and the culture to fully understand it.

So that is where so many people are. And particularly with women, I love you're talking about this idea of a mom's group where someone, a woman in the group had the courage to raise her hand and say, like, I actually don't know what you're talking about. What are you finding as you support women particularly? I'd like to talk about the Canadian church as a whole, because you've had a lot of experience working with leadership across the coast to coast across the country.

But when we're speaking particularly about women, like I think maybe that is a unique thing about women, or at least in that room that someone would have the courage to say, I actually don't know what you're talking about. What are you finding as some of those barriers and opportunities with women in particular?

Anne Miranda: Yeah, I wonder if it's like the first church where there's all these like disciples, and these women that are our lists in the Bible. They were disciples too.

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And that's what I'm seeing is women who just want to be students. They want to understand the Scripture; they want to pass it on to their friends and family and whatever that looks like in their communities. And so, there is definitely a desire for Bible study.

And women were making space in their own personal lives just to lean in, whether that's online or in person. It's a place where they can create community. And I'm going to say strengthen the inner soul, strengthen the soul for this life.

Like they don't want to do life on their own. And we carry so much, single or married, we carry so much in our lives. And there's so many responsibilities.

And there's all these different pressures on us. And it's just this; it sounds like a relief in a way to know that we don't have to do this on our own. And so, when we study Scripture, and I'm seeing in these circles of women, they're building friendships that they know are going to last.

They're building this relationship with each other and with God, we have a tagline that we say, we want to connect with God and connect with each other. And so, I think that's what I'm actually seeing. It seems so simple.

But it's, I think, a reflection of God's heart for all of us. And so, I'm seeing women rise up, I'm seeing people taking risks to come into spaces that may feel uncomfortable. Because there is no other word other than hungry that comes to mind.

It's like a need, an innate need to be learning. And that's beautiful.

Joanna la Fleur: And when you say that, I mean, you've been doing this for a while.

Are you saying this is a new thing? Or what I mean is, is this a new hunger you're noticing as a pattern amongst women that you're serving in your local church? Or is like, no, actually, I think women have always been hungry like this. Or you're saying like, has the temperature or the dial turned up recently?

Anne Miranda: I've always seen women in Bible studies. I have seen that.

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That is for sure. From coast to coast to coast. I think what I'm seeing is that the ordinary, like there's no need to go and get a degree.

It's like there's something that's been activated in the everyday ordinary woman. The girl that's carrying the baby on the hip, and the one that is, you know, I think I'm, I'm struggling with, like, it's just the everyday woman.

And before, maybe there was more what I saw maybe even 10 years ago, was a tendency for women who may consider themselves more educated or willing to put in the hard work of trying to figure this all out. And those people were wanting to study more together. But now I'm noticing just this broadening of the everyday woman go, how do I implement this in my life? How do I get seven minutes of my day to just read a song and selah for a minute, just pause my day and get this Scripture into my marrow and bones and marrow kind of thing.

And then that's going to help equip me for whatever it is that I'm doing my day. I'm seeing, maybe it's a resurgence of an appetite, rather than an apathy, which that is probably what I'm trying to nail is that in that last decade, I've seen more of a, I don't know if I get this. I don't know if I can actually understand this.

And now seeing a leaning in, that looks a little different when we create some of the Bible studies through the different ministries that I'm involved in. And that's like thousands of Bible studies are downloaded. What is this? What is going on here? It's not just because it's for free, but it's like, actually like, what is happening?

Joanna la Fleur: Right.

Well, and it seems like the, you know, not to go too far into this, but the data from people who do data work, Barna and others, there does seem to be what you're describing anecdotally, like you're experiencing in your local church with the women and people that you're leading. There is something here that's tracking around the country. There is an increase in pastors and leaders around the country are saying, you know, we're measuring more interest in the Bible.

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We're measuring less apathy. People who are here actually want to be here. I mean, I could speak of that about the Bible study in my own home.

As we go through the book of Mark, people showed up not because like there were a hundred other things they could have done that night, but they've showed up to study and to dive in and to be honest about how they're doing that in a way I haven't seen before. So, it's interesting that you're saying that.

And, you know, I think with women in particular, there are like unique needs of different demographics, however we splice it. Adults, children, men, women, different, you know, ethno economic groups, however we splice it up, there are different kind of patterns in the need. What are you seeing about that with women and the area of leadership? Do women think like when they are in a Bible study, are women saying, I could lead a Bible study? What are you seeing about women and leadership in this calling you have to help women rise up in influencing their own community?

Anne Miranda: So, I think there's two camps here.

There's this one type of woman or avatar guy that is like, yes, I want to make this really easy. I'm going to invite people to my home or I'm going to lead in like a small group setting or host a table at my church's Bible study. And yes, I want to lean into that.

Maybe she has a gift of hospitality. Maybe she has a gift of teaching. Maybe she, she just, this has transformed my life.

I want to share it with others. I always share my cousin who's now passed away from cancer and she didn't have a choice. She couldn't even read, but she wanted to get Scripture into her.

So literally Joanna, on her deathbed, there's like a hospital bed in her living room. She invites her friends, and they watch *The Chosen* and then they actually, she gets them to read Scripture because she couldn't, it would make her dizzy and it was like hard for her, but she could hear. And so, there's that kind of woman that will go to the nth degree because she knows it's transformational for her life.

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And she wants others to experience that. And she's not afraid of being called a leader. She's not afraid of being called a facilitator or any of those kinds of like, she's not afraid to just take the lead as she is loving her community.

Then there's this other side of women who are like, I want to participate, but I don't want to lead anything. And kind of shy back and pull themselves back because that word leader feels intimidating. And so, you'll see many groups across churches, they may call that person a coordinator, a facilitator, a host, any other word but leader.

And it puzzles me because maybe the sense of responsibility with that word leader feels heavy for some, but yet they're leading. And so, we have started to...

Joanna la Fleur: They call it whatever you want, they are doing it.

Anne Miranda: Yeah, you're still doing it, which is, you know, a little bit puzzling to wrestle with the not wanting to embrace a title or a word like that.

And so, I wonder because God calls us to lead, that's His Word. You be the head and not the tail. Like he's actually telling us, he's commissioning his disciples to go out and be dressed with power and authority and go.

So, I get really hyped up and passionate when I'm speaking to the church body and go like, this is what we're meant to do. We're meant to actually stand out like this, and we're meant to lead in these spaces that we're in. And yes, there may be different expressions of leadership, but that's okay.

Joanna la Fleur: Well, it makes me think of, I always think of you know, the woman at the well, as Jesus is talking to this woman with a really sordid history, personal history, pain, brokenness, sin, all the rest. And after their discussion, she goes to town and goes to the town and shares this good news, like leading this town saying, come and meet, come with me, come with me. He knew, He told me everything I'd ever done.

Like He knew everything about me, and He loved me. You know, this good news that she's sharing in the midst of her own mess that she was able to literally lead her town

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to Jesus, like literally come with me and come meet this guy, leading her town to Jesus. I mean, there's so many of those stories.

Anne Miranda: That's a great example because God's not asking us to be perfect or have a theology degree or figure all of our things out or have the perfect space and place to serve him. And so I wonder, as I'm creating these studies, I'm also creating like study guides, a facilitator guide, leader guides, whatever that looks like to help church leaders bring out that leadership in the people that they have, kind of trying to draw it out from a well, for people to identify themselves and look at themselves as they can be part of God's work in this way and study the Bible with their church community. So, it's so beautiful to embrace that, the fullness of that identity.

So that's part of what I'm seeing in women who are leading.

Joanna la Fleur: Now, you're mentioning this, let's go into this area of, maybe we could call it your passion around issues of justice or injustice. This has been like a, maybe like the woman at the well, horrible things had happened to her.

She had been rejected over and over by men is sort of the story of that woman that I happened to bring up. But this has been another theme in your own sense of calling, shepherding, teaching, leading, is around justice issues and advocating for particularly women, vulnerable women, or women who've gone through horrifying things in their life and need someone to help them get out of that. So, talk to us about that.

Like why, why this issue? What, you know, where does this rile you up and, where did this come from in your own journey?

Anne Miranda: So, I'm just going to give the disclosure right now that this is a trigger warning. This part of our podcast is, can be triggering for some, because we're going to talk about sexual exploitation and abuse. So that being said, my work in this particular area of justice began very early on.

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When I was 13 years old, I worked with the ministry of the attorney general's office in British Columbia for almost 10 years of my life. It's quite a wild story of how I got involved.

Joanna la Fleur: At 13 years old?

Anne Miranda: With, yeah, it was with the unit of crime and violence prevention at those times.

And they had a youth action committee that was touring British Columbia, giving presentations and trying to bridge the gap between youth and authoritative kind of positions of authority, whether that was government, the RCMP, different brands of, or different kinds of arms of education. And it was really effective. It still actually exists today.

It's so beautiful to see that work. And that was a lot of my leadership development was actually in that context where someone saw something in a really, really young Anne and said, okay, I'm going to bring this girl under my wing and we're going to do this work together. So, the piece of that, I loved that.

And in my school, there was a very impactful group. It was the multicultural club, but we did social justice work. Like it was amazing.

Hundreds of kids have come out of this group, and we do great work again in our city, but also in our province. And so, there's this advocacy part of me that was cultivated at a very young age, but mostly Joanna, because I felt like I could be a voice for the voiceless. Because in most of my childhood, there'd been so much abuse in my own life, sexual abuse.

And there was, I just kept it quiet. No one knew. And so, in this advocacy work, I felt like in some ways it was giving me a voice.

Now, if I fast forward years later, I come to know Jesus, I'm studying His Word. I'm going like line by line through Scripture. I didn't know if it was in chronological order or not.

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I just land on this passage in *Isaiah 61*. And I'm reading through this passage by myself in my house, solo with a Bible. And I want to read it for us because it's transformational.

And as I'm reading, it says,

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the broken hearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD's favor has come.

And it keeps on going. And it says that God would give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. And those that are like fond of theology and know this kind of stuff are like, Oh yeah, that's the great exchange. That's like, I didn't know any of that big fancy vocabulary. All I knew was that this is incredible that I could give my mourning to God. And He would then exchange it for joy.

I could give Him my despair, and He could give me festive praise. And this exchange I was sensing in that moment was happening. I'm just melting.

I'm in tears and I'm going, Oh God, not only that, but now I'm actually anointed to comfort the broken-hearted. It was like all that justice work was great. And now I could see the heart of God and that my purpose, part of my purpose on this planet is also to do this beautiful work that He's anointed me to do to take now Good News to the poor.

And I could understand, it was like this. The light bulb again was going off. The veil was being torn.

I was going, wow, this is actually the Lord who loves justice. It says in verse eight. And I'm just overwhelmed with God's presence in this moment.

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And I'm understanding that He's not just going to take away this despair and this mourning, but He's actually going to give me a double portion. It says of joy and honor. And He's taking my shame.

And I said a passion and like a fire in me was fanned through this Word and through this Scripture that I could go into really dark places here in Canada, because the majority of my work with sexual exploitation and human trafficking was Canada based. It wasn't abroad. The global part of my, even my interest was maybe in the last 15 years, but so much of my life was spent right here in Canada, Vancouver is a port city.

People are trafficked in and out of our port. And I knew that from a very young age. And so, this passage just infused me, I think with power and understanding that my life was being healed and I could extend that healing to other people as well.

And that's a huge part of my story, friend.

Joanna la Fleur: That's amazing. And, you know, one of the things, when I think of these calling stories in Scripture, as you're describing from 13 years old, you were doing this justice work and advocacy.

And then when you came to know Jesus in a more meaningful way, whether, you know, I don't know exactly how you, I don't know if that was a conversion or just a reawakening from your childhood or not, but it brought a new layer or reminds me of the story when Jesus is going by the fishing boats and says to them, to fishermen who were experts at their vocation of fishing. And He's saying like, come and be fishers of people, like you're going to come. And what I mean by that is I'm hearing in your story, taking what was already in you and now bringing a whole new, it's almost like it went from 2D to 3D or like it brought a new dimension or it brought a new depth and breadth to the power and purpose behind that thing you already cared about. And now God's saying like, just wait, there's so much more.

Anne Miranda: Yes. It's so beautiful.

Joanna la Fleur: Yeah. I love that.

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What I love that from start to finish, you continue to like say, and here's the Scripture that led me to it.

Again, God, you're demonstrating just in the stories of your life, how God was using Scripture, particularly to speak to you. And that we don't have to throw away all the things that we've been interested in or passionate about from the past when we become Christians, perhaps God has like a new dimension to this thing he already built us to know and love and do.

Where are you seeing that in, yeah, whether that's in your church with women there, or just again, as we kind of go, whether women or the church in Canada, across the country, I know you've had opportunities to work at national levels of ministry where you're having conversations with pastors, women, people across the country.

But what is it about, you know, what God is doing in Canada at this moment?

Anne Miranda: Yeah. I love how you said, God speaks through His Word. We're going to keep going back and recycling that one line.

He does speak through His Word. So, if it's people who are, my thing was justice. I knew if he was going to speak to me and he knew how to get my attention because that was something I was so passionate about.

I'll never forget the story of a young girl who was reading in Genesis, and she was by herself. She's like, I just want to read the Bible. She wasn't a believer yet.

And she was in the middle of this beautiful British Columbia creation sitting by the ocean. And as she's reading Genesis, she's like, oh, God's real. And it was the Genesis story that made her come to know who Jesus is.

Like, it's just, she's passionate about the outdoors. She's passionate about nature and stewardship of this planet and the environment and all those things. And God spoke to her through His Word in a way that she knew, he knew she would understand.

It's just wonderful. What I'm noticing in Canada is, some people have been like this, just negative. You know, Joanna, they're like, oh, God's not on the move.

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The church is dying and all of this. I'm like, no, that has not been my experience. I'm seeing a body of Christ, that big C kind of church experience, whether it's on a university campus or in churches or in homes.

I see just people leaning into God, into relationship with Jesus. Maybe even a boldness over Canadians. We're not known for our boldness.

We're known as peacekeepers, but maybe a boldness is now kind of stirring up. And I've liked that in the book of Acts chapter four, where they like laid hands on each other's and the disciples were clothed with boldness to go out and proclaim a word and the Good News and share the Good News. I'm seeing a boldness on Canadians I haven't noticed in a, ever.

I'm going to say ever. I've noticed in certain like individuals in my journey, in my 27 years of being a Christian, but not like this. And I think that's a really beautiful sign that God again is on a move in our country.

Our country, in our parliament, in our government building, there's Scripture everywhere. It's like this going back to reminding Canadians what this country has been built on, not built on a promise, built on the fact that this dominion was to honour God. And many of us that come from immigrant families know that our families have moved to this country thinking this was the land of milk and honey.

This was the land of promise. This was the land of peace, of refuge for so many. And I want to throw in there that this is a land where we can find God. We can find relationship with Jesus. And that's what I'm seeing in every generation.

I was in a group yesterday. It was like fivefold generation, I call it. So, the great grandparents, the grandparents, the parents, the young adults, and then their kiddos. Like, it's just amazing to see that many generations in a church body.

And no one is ashamed of the Gospel. It's the Roman 1 passage; *I shall not be ashamed of the Gospel*. And I am witnessing that in Canada.

And it's refreshing.

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Joanna la Fleur: You know, I think as we close here, maybe the last question is how, I'd like to get really practical with you, you know, be the pastor in the room. Is there something, when I think of this spiritually vibrant life that you live, that you're describing, you're seeing, bubbling up across the country, in women, in different generations, what is something practical that people can just say, I want that kind of vibrancy.

I don't want to be ashamed of my faith, or I want to know the Bible better. Is there just one simple thing that as like an action step that people could take today? Or is there a place in the Bible you want to send people to read? Or you mentioned earlier, something about a practice of getting in the Psalms. What is something that you want people to do today? If they're saying, I want this kind of spiritually vibrant life or home.

Anne Miranda: So, I would say, we are the ones that get to create our schedules. We're the ones that get to populate our schedule with whatever it is. And so, if that's from work to watching Netflix, all the things we get to choose.

And so, I wonder if the challenge today could be to carve out time. And you get to choose when that time is, if that's your lunch hour or your morning or your evening, carve out time to actually read or listen to. Don't give me the excuse that you can't read or you don't like reading.

Okay, that's why the audio Bible in this generation is available. It's so beautiful. Like, wow, we get access to this.

And so, it's such good news. And I would challenge us to carve out 10 minutes. Start off with small bites, like the appetizer, just 10 minutes.

And if that means you're going to go for a walk and you're going to listen, or you're going to read. And if we need to, then have an accountability partner so that that person and you are reading together or checking in to make sure that we're actually completing our 10 minutes.

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You know, that same cousin that I mentioned, she'd always say, if you don't want to invest in your sickness, invest in your health. And I wonder if we would invest in our soul health, what the outcome would be. We would become a Biblically literate generation. This Word transforms the world.

And if we know it, it'll transform our lives. So that would be my challenge. Let's just start small.

Joanna la Fleur: Really good. Anne, thank you for this. I think you've been a shot of encouragement to everybody.

It's amazing to always have opportunity to listen to people. You're with real people every week at your local church and you're seeing what God is doing, not just there, but all over the place. So, it's just such an encouragement and practical steps that we can all take.

So, thanks so much for joining us on the podcast today.

Anne Miranda: Thanks, Joanna.