

Women We Should Know: Hannah More

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[0:00] Amen. Father, we do just let our glad amen resound down joining those who across the ages have said it is indeed so to your faithfulness and your goodness and your mercy and your love.

So we thank you that we can root our lives upon the rock of your character and your covenant promises and it is well with us. Lord, so as we gather today to worship you, give us full hearts by the agency of your spirit that we might rejoice in the great salvation that is ours through Jesus Christ, our Lord. For his sake, we ask it. Amen.

Amen. All right. Well, welcome, friends. We are continuing on in our series of women you should know but might not have heard of. And this morning, we will consider together a woman of consecrated pen.

That is a phrase, the woman of consecrated pen of John Newton's of the subject of our talk.

Come, let us ride to London to see bishops and booksellers. Well, the summons came from a bright eyed little girl standing upon the lead chair in a line of them, an imaginary train for her and her four sisters, which would conduct them from the little country school house to the great metropolis.

[1:49] There they would see bishops and booksellers, attractions for the power their words pervade, able to change the world. That little girl was Hannah Moore. And though she already had an instinct for the magic of words, little could even she have imagined how hers would someday move the world.

In that school house that day transformed in its vacancy to a railroad station, Hannah's father was the schoolmaster and there taught boys. Boys, not girls. For in Hannah's time and place, 18th century England, girls were not thought fit subjects for education. At least not the academic education that boys might receive.

Mathematics and classical languages, those subjects of gravitas. If a woman managed to gain any education at all, it was restricted to what they called the alluring and useful arts. Dancing, music, French, painting, these things to allure prospective husbands. And perhaps embroidery, cooking and sewing to render them useful in marriage. How sad it must have been for those who had eyes to see.

The promise in girls to leave those rich fields fallow and uncultivated. I'm sorry, I have three daughters, so this is an emotional topic. Little wonder that some parents would not endure it and jump the conventional rails.

Hannah's mother, Mary Moore, was such a one. Seeing Hannah's precocity, she resolved when Hannah was but three or four to teach her to read, only to discover that she had already begun on her own. She had secretly listened to the lessons her mother had been given her older sisters through the keyhole.

[4:24] Surprised also was the country parson where Hannah recited the entire catechism from memory. So impressed, he gave her a sixpence. Her father, the schoolmaster, could not but notice Hannah's eagerness and aptitude.

But he was conflicted. Burdened by the prejudice of the day, he thought feeding her mind to be improper.

And yet, somehow in her case, irresistible. This collision produced a compromise. He would not starve her mind altogether, but would tightly restrict her diet as a woman. Despite her rapid progress in mathematics, he removed that subject from the table. But he did leave her Latin to hungrily devour.

It's easy to feel Hannah's plight tragic until we realize how much more privileged her portion compared to the vast majority of girls in her day. Hannah's was a flowering in a very uncongenial soil.

Being neither of the laboring nor of the aristocratic class, the only acceptable profession open to a woman was that of teaching. And Hannah and her four sisters were put on that trajectory.

[6 : 11] That it was for Hannah the perfect choice, none had any doubt. She had completed her first poem when only four. And already there she is. Again, I'll pop this back.

There she is handing her poem that she's just written up to her parents. And this poem she wrote at four years old reflected a keen observation of humanity and wonderfully witty facility with words.

It would seem a writer had been born and was rapacious for nourishment. The leading item on every birthday and Christmas wish list for Hannah was paper.

More paper. Every vacant bit of any scrap she could find, she filled with words. She filled with words, prose, poetry, narrative, often conveying some moral lesson.

Though in her later life, Hannah would speak with fondness of her childhood, her descriptions of early family life seem at variance with reality and reflected perhaps more of a story she wished to tell herself and others.

[7 : 41] She didn't seem emotionally close to her parents. Indeed, did not come to either of their deathbeds. A sense of fatherly affection, sadly, as for so many in her day, perhaps even in ours, would come only from her heavenly father.

But in that heavenly father's kind providence, what Hannah seemed to have lacked in parental affection was amply made up for among her sisters, with whom so much of her great adventure of life would be shared.

The first adventure this sisterhood embarked upon was a school. The Moore School for Young Ladies.

Theirs was a day of ready clientele. As Bristol, shown here in the slide, their school's location, was a prosperous port whose new wealth, much of which came through the slave trade, we'll find out later, whose new wealth was creating upward social mobility.

And not a few of the newly rich wanted to turn their wives and daughters into leisured ladies in imitation of the higher classes.

[9 : 11] Sensitive to this demand, the Moore sisters designed a hybrid education. Yes, supplying the fashionable dancing, needlework and music, but also progressive, singularly so, instructing the young women in reading and writing and mathematics even.

Hannah was first a fellow student, but soon became an instructor. And even a thoughtful theorist, educational theorist, pressing in essays for an education for women which aimed at cultivating the understanding.

What a thought. Not merely for ornamentation. The Moore School did marvelously well and became quite far-famed.

Always full at 60 students and a waiting list. By 1789, the sisters would make enough money to retire after 30 years of the operation for the school.

There is Hannah about that time. And not only did the school enjoy renown, but Hannah herself would through the productions of her pen.

- [10:35] But before we turn to the dramas of her own composition, we must mention a strange drama in her experience. A romantic drama, I suppose, for a country gentleman of ample resource named William Turner, much admired her ready wit and much enjoyed her company.

He gave her a room on his own very ample estate in which to write and gardens in which she might refresh her soul, which she lapped up avidly.

When an offer of marriage came from him, she accepted. None were surprised. Surprising, rather, was that Turner inexplicably broke the engagement right at the altar.

But only to renew the offer a little later. Over several agonizing years, this marriage offer was extended, withdrawn, then renewed.

not once, even twice, but three times. The grievous emotional ordeal took a heavy, heavy toll upon Hannah's health, which Turner himself recognized with great dismay, offering her 200 pounds a year in small compensation for his indecisiveness and stealing away her youthful years.

- [12:20] They actually remained friends all their days, and he would leave her a thousand pounds in his will. For all the romantic pain, this arrangement did provide for Hannah to pursue a literary career without financial encumbrance.

So that was a good that came of it. And this she did, taking up pen and writing. Her literary career began in earnest with the tragic drama Percy, which not only made it to the London Theatre, but there met with great enthusiasm.

There we are. The thunderous applause on opening night turned into the punned chant, More!

More! More! More! And more, more was quite able to give her London audience. Her pen moved as if inspired.

Indeed, David Garrick, the most celebrated actor of the London stage, nicknamed Hannah Nine, by which he hailed her as the embodiment of all of the muses.

- [13:41] You remember, there were nine classical muses, and he just called her Nine because she was so profusely gifted. Samuel Johnson, oh, oh, here we are.

There is a picture of the nine muses. It sits, I believe, in the London Art Gallery, and the one on the far right here is actually Hannah Moore.

So this, they were depicting the most influential and extraordinarily literary women of the day, and Hannah made the cut and was painted.

these, many of them were the famous blue stockings, a literary group of women who would come together and discuss all manner of intellectual things in their own wonderfully gracious and winsome and scintillating ways.

So, a wonderful piquant group of which Hannah was a part, the blue stockings. But that's another story, a good one, but we might tell it later. So, Samuel Johnson, there he is, Samuel Johnson, the most celebrated of public intellectuals of his day, arbiter of literary taste, and the single-handed author of the English Dictionary.

- [15:05] He found Hannah's work absolutely top shelf. Once at a literary soiree, the topic of poetry came up, and Johnson immediately warned the circle to speak with care in her presence.

It is dangerous to say a word of poetry before her. It is his talking of the art of war before Hannibal, remember the great Carthaginian general in the Punic Wars.

But, of all Hannah found in London, the most determinative, more than popular applause or famous friends, was an encounter with an old pastor at St. Mary's Woolnath.

Hannah was, at this time, for all the acclaim and success, seeking something more substantial and enduring. One of her blue-stocking circle had given her a volume of letters of spiritual direction called Cardifonia, or we might translate it utterances of the heart.

And Hannah found in them something, there it is, there it is, Hannah found in them something new to her spiritual senses, something vital and experimental, as she described it.

[16:34] The word experimental in that day is, we would use the word experiential, rather as relating to her experience, a deep experience. We'd say real Christianity.

Experimental, vital and experimental. Or as she would elsewhere describe it, religion of the heart. Who was this author?

Hannah resolved to find him and find what it was that he wrote of. The author was that, the author of that most blessed volume was none other than the utterly transformed Wylam slave captain and author of that beloved hymn, Amazing Grace, John Newton.

There he is, just a tad, well, yeah, there he is. I love that picture of Newton. There are many and that's one of my favorites. Well, so John Newton, the author of Cardifonia.

Upon this discovery, Hannah beat an immediate path to his church. Today, I have been to hear good Mr. Newton preach, she tells, and afterward, went and sat an hour with him and came home with two pockets full of sermons.

[18:02] Well, through this ever-deepening friendship with Newton, Hannah came to know for herself, experimentally, this religion of the heart and her newfound evangelical faith changed the course of her life.

We love Newton at home and he's got his book of spiritual letters. This is my, Anita couldn't be here this morning, she's not feeling well, but she asked me to put this up. This is one of her favorite quotes from John Newton.

Perhaps you've heard it. I am not the man I ought to be, I'm not the man I wish to be, and I'm not the man I hope to be, but by the grace of God, I am not the man I used to be.

Ah, isn't that wonderful? It is certainly something we could all affirm who know the gospel in our hearts experimentally.

Newton was also the inspiration of a circle of evangelical, social, and political activists. William Wilberforce, there he is, I love this, this is my favorite picture of Wilberforce, his eyes just are so wonderfully kind.

[19:24] Wilberforce, most prominent among this group, known as the Clapham sect, not a sect, just a group of evangelical Anglicans of that day.

And Hannah became active in that circle. Through the lenses of her newfound and growing faith, the glittering allure of London's fashionable life was quickly fading for Hannah.

Even its grandeur seemed to her a littleness, as she called it. And she was inclined to withdraw from it into a spiritual retirement in the country.

It was her new friend, Wilberforce, who challenged her, repeating the very advice John Newton had earlier given to him when upon his, Wilberforce's, newfound faith, he, Wilberforce, had been inclined to do the same, withdraw into kind of a spiritual solitude, maybe become a minister.

And John Newton told Wilberforce, the young Wilberforce, no, don't retire your gifts. Deploy them for some gospel-inspired good in this world.

[20:50] And Wilberforce then repeated Newton's advice to Hannah. And just as Newton had not lacked for a suggestion as to where Wilberforce might put in his oar, Wilberforce was happy to put Hannah's pen to good in the same cause.

And soon, that is the slavery issue, and soon it was discovered that her gifts were perfectly suited to the need of the day, which was to reach the hearts of the British people and stir their moral imagination.

To this, Hannah was perfectly attuned from her skill as an accomplished dramatist. That, indeed, had been her standard of success, moving the heart.

A tear shed is worth a thousand clapping hands, she would say. And with that aim, she composed the poem slavery, 1788, a time to appear just before Wilberforce was to present a resolution in parliament.

For as Wilberforce had quickly discerned, in parliamentary measures of importance, more is to be done out of the House of Lords Commons, than in it.

[22 : 33] See, he understood how critical it was for popular agitation to influence the lawmakers in parliament. Nothing's changing. They would have to change hearts before they could hope to change laws.

Well, here are a few lines of Hannah's poem. When e'er to Afric shores I turn my eyes, horrors of deepest, deadliest guilt arise.

I see by more than fancy's mirror shown the burning village and the blazing town. See the dire victim torn from social life, the shrieking babe, the agonizing wife.

She, wretch forlorn, is dragged by hostile hands to distant tyrants sold in distant lands. Transmitted miseries and successive chains, e'en this last wretched boon their foes deny to weep together or together die.

By felon hands, by one relentless stroke, she, the fond links of nature broke, see, the fond links of nature broke, the fibers twisting round a parent's heart, torn from their grasp and bleeding as they part.

[24 : 11] Another friend of abolition, the celebrated poet William Cooper, the poet, also a great hymn writer, thought Hannah's poem so good, he dropped his design to write one himself in the cause.

That was just a little tiny piece of it. It's an incredibly long poem. Hannah also discovered a marvelous gift for composing simple but engaging stories, written for the laboring classes, full of dramatic pictures, and made affordable for the humblest cottage dweller at only pennies a piece.

And so they rolled from her pen, and into hands, ready hands, Babay, a true story of a good Negro woman, then the black, prince, a true story of the life and death of Nyambana, an African king's son, the sorrows of Yamba, or the Negro woman's lamentation, and more and more.

And you'll see on the bottom, sold for a penny, just one penny, and so affordable. Hannah also led a boycott of West Indian sugar, no small sacrifice for a tea-drinking nation that loved their sweets.

As she satirically poked, this is one of my favorite pictures of Hannah. You can just kind of see the little kind of smirky smile there.

[26 : 01] So this diddy aimed at those who love their sweets. I own, I am shocked at this purchase of slaves, and fear those who buy them and sell them are knaves.

What I hear of their hardships, their tortures and groans, is almost enough to draw pity from stones. I pity them greatly, but I must be mum, for how could we do without sugar and rum?

Especially sugar, so needful we see. What? Give up our desserts, our coffee, and tea? When the emancipation bill finally passed in the House of Commons, 1833, it was a hard-won victory, which could never have been attained apart from the dedicated pen of Hannah Moore in ceaseless motion.

Really, we've all heard of Wilberforce, but not quite as many have heard of Hannah Moore, and her part was equally pivotal, doubtless, equally pivotal.

For many years, Anglican missionaries had a policy of naming orphaned African girls after Hannah in honor of her labors in the cause of abolition.

[27 : 33] Still a very common name in many parts of Africa. Well, though Hannah did not retire from active life, she did retire to the country and made her home in a little cottage called Cow's Lip Green or Cow's Lip Green.

There it is, delightful little cottage as it still survives today. It was here her good friend Wilberforce and Wilberforce's sister came to visit.

The lovely countryside might restore Wilberforce's weary frame and sent him walking through the beautiful Cheddar Gorge nearby. But upon his return, Wilberforce was more agonized than refreshed, for he had observed with disbelief and horror how squalidly and religionless the common folk in that region existed.

Apparently, there was no resident minister in the area to relieve the ignorance and suffering. Something must be done, said Wilberforce to Hannah, and if you will be at the trouble, I will be at the expense.

Well, the fruit of this alliance was the opening of a Sunday school in Cheddar. There's an old, old postcard of that first little Sunday school.

[29 : 12] And by Sunday school, originally, Sunday school meant not exclusively religious instruction, but general instruction held on Sunday, the only day available for the laboring classes.

So it was the whole gamut of subjects, but on a Sunday, started by Christians. Well, Hannah put her heart into the mission.

She acquired a building, there it is, and hired a teacher, and with her sister Patty, canvassed cottage to cottage in the village to collect the grimy faced urchins that were abundantly present.

The labor intensive cottage to cottage solicitation paid off, for upon the school's opening, 130 were in their seats.

Though the need was enormous, it had been largely overlooked until Wilberforce and Hannah, as Moore wrote to Newton, while we're sending missionaries to our distant colonies, our own villages are perishing for lack of instruction.

[30 : 30] instruction consisted in reading, basic arithmetic, and Bible, along with some practical skills to make the students more employable upon their graduation, such as knitting and spinning.

Hannah would even interview local manufacturers to see what skills were needed and seek to provide for them in the curriculum that was offered. With Hannah's diligence and persuasiveness and the evident results, enrollment in the Cheddar School rapidly grew to 300.

How they fit 300 little urchins into that building, I don't know. And by 1796, a mere seven years after Wilberforce's anguished walk that had inspired this exploit, Hannah had 1,700 students in schools across 10 parishes.

Isn't that marvelous? It's fantastic. Hannah then expanded the operation to reach the parents, inviting them in Sunday evenings where a sermon and a chapter of the Bible were read, followed by a hymn and a prayer.

Well, only four parents showed up the first week, but soon 60 crowded the school. And by this very uncommon for the day involvement with common folk, Hannah began to understand more of the challenges many of the poor families faced and was able to forge creative means of alleviating them.

[32 : 22] It's amazing when you actually mingle with the needy, you begin to understand the needs. So, she established friendly societies as they came to be called for women which served like an insurance collective where members paid small dues and from these would receive in circumstances of illness or injury a set payment to preserve them from subsistence crises that they might have along the way.

It was a world of good Hannah managed to do in the lives of the most vulnerable. But, the work was not unopposed.

Think, well, who could oppose a work like that? Well, as Moore wrote to Newton, one great benefit which I have found to result from our projects is the removal, and this is going to be the problem, is the removal of that great gulf which has divided the rich from the poor in these country parishes by making them meet together, whereas before they hardly thought they were children of one common father.

more. But such mingling of the classes was thought by not a few to be dangerously radical, and Moore was bitterly and damningly denounced as such, a dangerous radical.

And aggravating the animus against her, the teacher in her Blagden school, another one of the poor schools that she had established, was accused of methodistical practices.

[34 : 18] It seemed that the school teacher in the Blagden school had offered an extemporaneous prayer before a snack, a meal.

That is, by extemporaneous prayer, that is a prayer that was not read out of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. These things were highly regulated within the Anglicanism of that day.

so virulent was the public attack upon Hannah for this instance, that three years of her life were absorbed in defending herself and this project of schools, poor schools, in the vicious controversy that this one prayer precipitated.

even her sisters were dragged into the slander. Flyers were publicly and prominently posted, pointing passers-by in her village to where they could see, quote, the menagerie of five female savages of the most desperate kind.

Well, as thick-skinned as Hannah was, these cruel attacks were a grievous cudgelling, and she probably never fully recovered from the physical and mental toll.

[35 : 46] Reluctantly, she closed the Blagden school, lamenting the, quote, wantonness of cruelty, which, in civilized places, few persons, especially of my sex, have been called to suffer.

She was horrified, but exhausted, absolutely eviscerated. Notwithstanding, Hannah continued to work with her Sunday schools for the remainder of her life.

She had just closed the one school. 30 more years she worked with these poor schools, and they became, subsequently, the basis of the national public schools in place across all England today.

That goes back to Hannah Moore. Thanks, in large measure, to Hannah's vision and dedication, by 1850, three-quarters of the laboring class's children, between ages five and 15, were enrolled in Sunday schools.

Isn't that astonishing? Three-quarters of all the laboring class children in England, between five and 15, were in Sunday schools. It's truly remarkable.

[37 : 20] Progressive as Hannah was in her promotion of schooling for the poor and women, children. It's no small irony that she was widely denounced as dangerously revolutionary, for her politics were actually very conservative.

While English urchins were learning their letters in more schools, a revolution was brewing across the channel. Oh, there's another one of her poor schools.

How old was she at this time? Let me see. She would have been 40s, I think.

Between 40 and 50 at this time? Yeah. So, over across in France.

And, however noble the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, when hoarsely shouted by a bloodthirsty, murderous Parisian mob, Hannah would have nothing of it.

[38 : 35] As she wrote exasperatedly in 1793, from liberty, equality, and the rights of man, good Lord, deliver us. She's thinking of those episodes across France.

It was a heady time for political ideas and experiments, experiments like our own nascent nation, and England was awash in a sea of political pamphlets, cheaply printed and easily distributed.

One particularly incendiary with new ideas was Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man*. There he is and there it is, in which he argued for people's right to revolt and so free themselves from their oppressive conditions.

A pamphlet that was actually quite significant in the founding of our nation early on.

religion was often supportive of the political hierarchy, it too came into Paine's crosshairs.

[39 : 54] And so the specter of atheism was raised alongside that of revolution and the anarchy which it was thought would assuredly be brought by any revolution.

The second part of Paine's *Rights of Man* was printed cheaply enough to gain a wide readership among the working classes and many an English aristocrat shook with terror at its impact.

What could be done to preserve England against bloody revolution horrifically showcased in France? Well, the counterstroke came from a little cottage, Hannah Moores.

Well, Edmund Burke engaged in a literary duel with Paine in polished and ponderous prose and of the conservative flagship in all of its weighty majesty.

Hannah knew how to take the ideas to Village Green and Cobbler Shop. In the perfect vernacular needed, she produced her *Village Politics*.

[41 : 10] There it is. The title *Village Politics Addressed to All the Mechanics, Journeymen, and Day Laborers in Great Britain* by Will Chip, a country carpenter.

This came out in 1792. In an extended dialogue between the town blacksmith Jack Anvil and the mason Tom Hod, Hannah managed in clear but colorful language to express but then confute the currently circulating arguments for revolutionary politics.

The work has been dubbed *Burke for Beginners* and Horace Walpole judged it quote, infinitely superior to anything on the subject, clearer, better stated, and comprehending the whole mass of the matter in the shortest of compass, a marvel.

Moore's pamphlet achieved phenomenal circulation due to its singular readability and affordability. Indeed, the British government purchased thousands of copies for free distribution and the work was translated into French and Italian.

One of the appealing features of Hannah Moore to me is her piquant combination of conservative and progressive views.

[42 : 47] Surely there is something right about the conservative instinct, let's call it that, that recognizes that we are the beneficiaries of many good things that we have inherited from the labors of our predecessors, which are worth valuing and preserving.

There ought to be a healthy reluctance to thoughtlessly burn everything to the ground and fashion all anew. As G.K.

Chesterton observed, if you come across a fence in a seemingly odd place, before you just tear it down, see if you can discover why it was put there in the first place.

But, neither did Hannah simply baptize the social order and received customs and institutions, as we clearly saw.

She could imagine something better. And this, we might call the progressive instinct. And surely it is also right and healthy.

- [43 : 59] Can we not imagine an improvement to our present and take concrete steps toward it? Well, Hannah certainly thought so.

in 1799, there she is, Hannah wrote a plea, an outline for the education of women, very progressively.

The fashion of the day for women and girls too, was to emphasize beauty and the ornament that accompanied it.

Little girls were slotted into this convention as early as four years old with what were called baby balls.

As more fiercely penned, they step, speaking of these little ones, they step at once from the nursery to the ballroom and, by a change of habits as new as it is preposterous, are thinking of dressing themselves at an age when they used to be dressing their dolls.

- [45 : 18] Instead of bounding with the unrestrained freedom of little wood nymphs over hill and dale, their cheeks flushed with health and their hearts overflowing with happiness, these gay little creatures are shut up all the morning, demurely practicing the pagrav and transacting the serious business of acquiring a new dance step for the evening, with more cost of time and pains than it would have taken them to acquire twenty new ideas.

Thus, they lose the amusements which properly belong to their smiling period. Neither did such leave women any less empty in older age.

When beauty is all that is expected of a woman, what is she left with in its absence? It is a most severe trial, writes Moore, for those women to be called to lay down beauty who have nothing else to take up.

It is for this sober season of life, that education should lay up its rich resources. It was now this season for Hannah, and happily, she was surrounded by riches within and without.

She moved to a new country cottage, Barleywood. There it is. Isn't it lovely? It still stands today. It's a more recent picture, and was joined by her sisters, reunited again as they were in their first venture of a women's school.

- [47 : 08] Here the five sisters were seldom alone as visitors were constantly descending upon them, once as many as 80 in a single week. Barleywood Cottage was described as the favored seat of intellectual and religious sunshine, a veritable evangelical center.

Here's such a lovely cottage. There's the back of it, where there's another view of it. Here, Hannah spent her last years in the happy company of her sisters.

Their retirement seems not entirely leisured. They took in the child of a widowed servant, and then two orphans and continued their compassionate involvement in the lives of the children in their poor schools.

And she continued to write, indeed, 11 books after the age of 60. There's some of her private devotions that she wrote, quite wonderful, and also continued to write sacred dramas, too.

Hannah would outlive all her sisters, including Patty, her dearest earthly friend, who, she said, was her very hands, eyes, and ears.

- [48 : 34] So attentively and affectionately did she attend her beloved older sister, always the eager party to her benevolent schemes.

dreams. But finally, she was all alone. There she is in her winter years.

It was said that prayer was the last thing that lived in her. At the last, a friend at her bedside reported, her face was smooth and glowing.

Remember the name of her dearest sister. she called out Patty very plainly and exclaimed joy. These were her last words.

And they were almost entirely bawdy stories or superstitious tales. then she offered them something in their stead.

The taste of Hannah's day will not be those of ours, neither our interests theirs, so as skilled as was Hannah as a translator, it would not do to give our day Hannah more.

Oh, oh my goodness. We started a little late this time. I so apologize. Well, thank you, team. And we will, I guess, we will see you next week.

Yep.