

“God Has Heard”

Wow! Let’s give the “Mother of the Year” award to a mom who gave away her son! Yes, that’s the story of Hannah. She promised God that if he would give her a son, she would give him back, to serve God all of his life. And out of her prayer came the great prophet, Samuel, the one who would anoint the first kings of Israel.

A little background on Hannah, since we don’t have time today to read the entire chapter: She was one of two wives of a guy named Elkanah. His other wife, Peninnah, was having children left and right, but Hannah’s womb was barren. (Most scholars believe this is probably why Elkanah married Peninnah, because he wasn’t having any kids with Hannah.) As you can imagine, in a culture where a woman’s life centered around providing offspring, there was some jealousy. In fact, pretty much any time you see polygamy practiced in the Bible, you find jealousy. In this family, Ms. “Fertile Myrtle” Peninnah is downright mean and flaunts her children around Hannah. Elkanah reminds Hannah that he loves her more than ten sons, but it matters little. She throws herself at the altar in God’s house and prays so fervently that the elderly priest Eli thinks she’s drunk. And that’s pretty much the background story.

But looking closer, Hannah has a lot to teach all of us, whether you’re a mother or not. I learned a lot this week in diving into Hannah’s story, mostly about how to pray, so here are the things that I have gleaned that I want you all to consider this morning, The first is...

1. Prayer is private and personal just as much as it is public and communal. As believers we are to live a life of prayer just as often as Hannah did when she went to God’s house. So we too must find our place for prayer that is private and personal that connects us with our relationship with God.

“God Has Heard”Prayer is pouring out your heart to God (v. 15)

In verse 15, Hannah tells Eli that she’s not drunk. Rather, she says, “I was pouring out my soul to the Lord.” The literal Hebrew says her spirit was sharply pained. Today we might say she was pouring out her heart to God. I hope you are able to be real in your prayers. You don’t need to impress God. It’s not like he might say, “Wow! I really didn’t know it was so bad!” He already knows what you’re thinking. And yet, like any good parent, he still wants you to bring your needs to him. You’ve never really prayed until you have been absolutely desperate for God to come through for you. And in that moment, as you pour out your heart, as you pour out your soul, in that moment you are ripe for a miracle. You are most likely to see the miraculous hand of God in your life. The God who can open a barren womb can change your circumstances in a way you could never predict. Don’t make prayer your last option; make it your first, and see what God will do.

Ruth Bell Graham, most well known as the wife of evangelist Billy Graham, in her book, “Clouds are the Dust of His Feet” (1992), writes this poem about a praying mother:

Listen, Lord, a mother’s praying
low and quiet: listen, **please**.
Listen what her tears
are saying, see her heart
upon its **knees**;
lift the load from her bowed shoulders
till she sees and **understands**,
You, Who hold the worlds together,
hold her problems in Your **hands**.

Pour out your heart to God. And then,

2. (v. 18) - Take heart that God hears you

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Note the dialogue between Eli and Hannah in verses 17 and 18. After Eli realizes Hannah is not drunk after all, but simply desperate for God, he responds to her, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.” Then Hannah replies, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” **I love her faith here**, for the rest of verse 18 tells us, “Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.” Her whole mood has changed! She has given her burden to God, and God has replaced it with that “peace that passes all understanding,” as the Apostle Paul would later describe it.

Folks, God answers every prayer! Every prayer! He may not answer it the way you think he should, but still he answers it. I saw something the other day that said, “God answers in one of three ways: ‘yes,’ ‘no,’ and ‘What were you thinking???’” I’ve probably got a lot of prayers in the third category!

Hannah could get up and eat and not be sad anymore because she knew without a doubt that God would answer her prayer. Pour out your heart to God and then take heart that God hears you. Step out in faith, trust that God will answer you.

This next point may be the hardest for all of us to consider...

3. Give back to God what he gives you (v. 11, 28)

Here is the strange twist. Hannah finally gets her long-awaited son. Then, as she had promised, when her son has been born she brings him to Eli for full-time service to God. From now on, she will only see him once a year, on her annual trip to worship, with a birthday cake.

Does this sound strange to give something back to God that you have wanted for so long? And what’s the larger application for those of us who can no longer have children? I’m

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thinking its that we need to hold our possessions lightly, with an open hand. We beg God for better health. Maybe we need to give our health back to God, and learn ways to honor him through what little health we do have. We hope for a new car. Once we get it, maybe we should find ways to honor God with it, because if we really understand scripture, it's God's car anyway. He's just letting us borrow it for a while. We plead for our family and friends who are in the dark to turn their lives around. But maybe, in addition, we could release these same people back to God, since they are his anyway. There is no need to worry when they are in God's hands. Maybe we could grow more like Hannah and take whatever God blesses us with and then commit that back to God to bless him. And then we will realize our final point today, which is to...

4. Receive God's abundance (2:21)

Hannah prays a remarkable prayer in chapter 2 of 1 Samuel. We read it earlier. It is so amazing that the Virgin Mary later will use parts of it in her own prayer of thanks to God for carrying the Messiah.

Eli prays for Hannah and Elkanah, asking God to give them more children to replace the one Hannah has so selflessly committed to the Lord's service. And 1 Samuel 2:21 tells us the rest of the story: “And the Lord was gracious to Hannah; she gave birth to three sons and two daughters.” These five kids would never replace Samuel, her firstborn. I can only imagine how proud she must have been as he humbly served God all of his life. Though she only got to see him once a year, God gave her other children to raise every day.

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Did you know God wants to bless you? He wants to give you much, because he wants us to give him much thanks for all he has done for us. I'm just saying Hannah and so many others in the Bible show us that God really does want to bless us. I like the Apostle Paul's wording in Ephesians 3:20, that God's blessing will be more than you can "ask for or even imagine." That's a great blessing! "God, don't give me what I ask for, when you have something better in mind!" That's a helpful prayer to pray. God often has something better in mind for us. And God chooses to bless most often through our thankful hearts, as he did with Hannah. Be thankful for what you have, and watch God bless you with more.

This is truly a fitting message as this Thursday is Thanksgiving, let us then ask God this week to become more like Hannah: to go somewhere personal, to pour out our heart to God, to take heart that God hears us, to give back to God what he gives to us, to receive God's abundance, and in that abundance be thankful for what we have, and watch God bless us with more.

Let us pray:

Lord, you are a good God. We thank you for mothers everywhere, for their sacrificial, steady love that we see here in Hannah's life. May we learn from Hannah to bring our deepest needs to you, knowing that you will come through with what is best for us, your children. You are the perfect parent, and we can trust every burden to you. And as you answer our prayers in the way that is best, help us to commit that answer to your service through praise and thanksgiving. In Jesus' holy name, Amen.