

"Hannah: A Woman of God"

In our Bible the Book of First Samuel follows the Book of Ruth. But in the Hebrew Bible, First Samuel followed the Book of Judges. The last verse of the Book of Judges sets the stage for the beginning of First Samuel. That verse says, "In those day there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

For the people of Israel, it was a time of moral and spiritual laxity. There was no central authority unifying the 12 tribes of Israel. Even though God would raise up gifted leaders called judges to rally the people against their enemies, after each particular leader died, the people soon slipped into unbelief and disobedience again. People did what was right *in their own eyes*.

God was about to raise up a man named Samuel, who would lead the people through a time of transformation. But behind the story of Samuel is the story of Hannah, his mother! Hannah was a woman of God. She can serve as a model of the kind of women (and men) we need today!

Hannah was much like us. She was a mix of joy and pain, a lady with problems just like us. For instance, she was married to a man named Elkanah, but she was one of two wives! "He (Elkanah) had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children" (1 Samuel 1:2).

Ladies, how would you like to share your husband with another woman? (Now don't say, "She can have him!"). I wouldn't want to share with Nancy with another man! Imagine the family dynamics that must produce! A little boy once shared this bit of misinformation: "A Christian should have only 1 spouse. This is called monotony." But I would add: Having more than one spouse is called misery! I've seen stories about polygamists, Mormons in Utah. In the interviews, I noticed that the women appeared happy and content, but I can't help but wonder if they really were!

Probably Hannah was Elkanah's *first* wife. We can assume that, since it says she couldn't bear children to Elkanah, and it was the practice of that time that if one's wife was barren, the husband was permitted to have a second wife. The other wife, Peninnah, had children to Elkanah. (Note: It is assumed here, and other places in Scripture, that is a couple were unable to bear children that it was the *woman* who was the infertile partner!)

For Hebrew women, to be childless was a sign of reproach, disgrace. The Hebrew belief in life after death at the time was pretty much limited to the belief that you lived on in your male descendants. So, if you had none, your name would be blotted out forever.

To make matters worse, the other wife would taunt Hannah for being childless. No doubt most of the time these two wives lived in separate tents. They stayed apart. But when the family went up to the temple at Shiloh Peninnah would use that time together to rub salt into Hannah's wound. "Her rival (Peninnah) used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat" (1 Samuel 1:6-7). Hannah's husband Elkanah really loved her and tried to console her. But Hannah was so upset she

wouldn't eat. What could have been a time of *joyful worship* in the temple would be a time of sadness and misery and depression for Hannah.

From all we can tell, Hannah is a good woman who loves God, but still has to cope with problems and struggles. Isn't that you and me? Any of us here who don't have our ups and downs in life? Our joy and pain? Our triumphs and failures?

But then, too, Hannah is a woman of faith and prayer. This particular family visit to Shiloh, Hannah slips into the sanctuary, and prays - not just a casual, half-hearted prayer - but an *intense prayer*. "She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. She made this vow: 'O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you, as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head'" (1 Samuel 1:10-11). Hannah prays for a son. Praying silently, her lips moving, her body swaying with intensity, the priest Eli sees her and thinks she's drunk! She says, no, "I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord" (verse 15).

Hannah prayed - heartfelt, earnest prayer. We need people today who will pray that way!

Not just pray-when-we-have-the-time, pray-when-you-feel-like-it...but regular, disciplined prayer. Private, solitary praying *as individuals*, if we're going to walk with God. Prayer together *as a church*, that this place can be a house of prayer! Prayer was our focus during this past Lenten season. Let's not quit, now that Lent is over.

Hannah prayed for a son, whom she could dedicate completely to the Lord. Overhearing her prayer, the priest Eli says to her, "Go in peace. God will give you what asked for." Does she believe him? Look at verse 18: "She (Hannah) said, 'Let your servant find favor in your sight.' Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer." Did Hannah believe what God told her through the priest Eli? Yes! She is so confident God's going to answer her prayer that her sadness and depression is lifted!

May God give us women - and men - with that kind of faith today! People who pray, then trust God, even when they can't imagine how God will work things out! Ray Stedman, Bible teacher and scholar, told of visiting Scotland. He was a guest in a home where people had gone through heavy bombings during World War II. The lady hosting him and some friends told of the night she and her 6 year old son were alone in the house, when they heard German bombers coming. "We knew we were in for trouble, so we put out all the lights and huddled together in the darkness. We listened to the bombs falling on the shipyards, and there was tremendous, deafening noise. These explosions were just a few miles away, and we knew there was a possibility that one of the bombers might miss the mark and drop bombs right on our house. As I gathered my little boy to me he looked up at me and said, 'Mum, sing something.'

"Well," she said, "I didn't feel like singing, but he wanted me to sing, so I said, 'What do you want me to sing?' He said, 'Sing, "God Is Still On the Phone" (actually, it's "God Is Still On the

Throne"). So she sang. "God is still on the phone, He never forsakes his own. His promise is true, He will not forget you, God is still on the phone." When she had finished singing, the boy said, "Now, let's pray that God will take all the bangs away." So they prayed that God would stop the explosions. As they were praying, the little boy fell asleep and he slept all through the night. Though the explosions went on all night long, he never heard one of them. In the morning when he woke, he said, "Oh, Mum, isn't it wonderful? God is on the phone, isn't he? He took all the bangs away. I never heard any more." What a great gift that mother gave her child. She gave him a model of what it is to trust God

We need moms like that today. We need dads who can model what it is to trust God in all the circumstances of life. We need grandmothers and granddads who can show grandchildren what it is to pray, and then have faith that God will guide the outcome!

I heard about a 51 year old man named Scott, who has claimed to be an agnostic all his life (an agnostic is someone who would believe if it could be proved that there is a God). For about a year and a half he had been attending a large, well known church that tries to reach unchurched people in culturally relevant ways. Scott says how he attended a very low-key church in his childhood, where he was never really asked to believe in anything, and he didn't. He quit going when he was in 4th or 5th grade. Scott talks about his home life: "Within our home, my father was very vocal about being agnostic." But then listen to this: "My mother was quiet with her Christian beliefs. On a totally conscious level, her religious influence didn't have a prayer with me. *But her faith may be an underlying reason* why I am so enthusiastic and attend (this church)." Did you hear that? His mom's quiet faith might be the reason why he's more on the verge of making a commitment to Christ than ever before!

Hannah, like us, had her struggles in life, but she was a woman of prayer and faith. What an example she would provide for son Samuel. ***But Hannah was also a woman who made promises to God and kept them.*** Look again at verse 11: "She made this vow: 'O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you, as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.'" She made a vow to God that if God would give her a son, she would dedicate him to be a nazirite. A "nazirite" was a person who out of dedication to the Lord would not drink wine or strong drink, nor use a razor to cut his hair. He was to be set apart, separated, totally to serve God. In fact, the word "nazirite" means "one separated".

Well, Hannah got pregnant. She *did* have a son. She named him Samuel. Did she ***remember*** the promise she had made to God?

There was this man who had been an avid golfer all his life, but as he got up in years, his eyesight got steadily worse. It got to the point where he couldn't see the ball in the air after he hit it. Then one day he heard about an experimental new procedure that was available to help eyesight problems like his. He spent a lot of money to get that treatment, and it worked like a charm. He could see like he had not been able to see in 40 years. Excitedly, he called a golfing

buddy and reserved a tee time at his favorite golf course. He teed up on the first hole, and uncorked a long drive. "I can see the ball!" he shouted. "I can see it!" After his partner teed off, as they piled into their golf cart, he kept on chattering: "I could really see the ball in the air that time!" They drove up the fairway a distance, and looked around. And they looked and looked and looked for the ball. Finally, his friend asked him, "Well, if you saw the ball, where did it go?" The old golfer scratched his head, frowned, and sadly said, "I don't remember."

Did Hannah remember the promise she had made to God? Yes! She keeps her son Samuel, caring for him some 2-3 years. Then she takes him to the temple. Here's the account of what happens: "When she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh; and the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, "Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed; and the LORD has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD. She left him there for the LORD" (1 Samuel 1:24-28). Notice, it says, "She left him there for the Lord." Imagine that! She waited so long to have a child. Now, she was willing to let go, so he could be devoted to Lord. And it was there in the temple that the young Samuel heard God calling him to lead Israel out of the spiritual doldrums!

Parents, our children really do not belong to us! They belong to God. We just have them for short time. Before I became a father, I read a book by Charlie Shedd. Charlie was a pastor, author, and a really neat guy! He called this book *Promises to Peter*. Peter was their fourth child. On the day Peter was born, Charlie made a pact with him. He promised about what kind of father he would be. Listen to what Charlie regarded as the most important thing he pledged to his new son.

"Here is the top promise. I will do everything I can to put your hand in the hand of your Heavenly Father.

"I see many people with troubles - and numberless folks lost in the high weeds. Yet I have never seen one of them but that their problem centers in this: They have lost their hold on the hand of God.

"You see, Peter, you don't really belong to me. God put you here. What is a baby? Science says a baby is fourteen percent coal tar, nineteen percent calcium, eight percent phosphorus, eleven percent magnesium, and things like that. This is a baby. But some day you will be married and have a baby of your own. And when the woman you love holds that baby in her arms, you will know that anything as wonderful as a baby had to come from God.

"I hope that I will be able to make religion natural to you. It is natural. In fact, I think this relationship with God is the only thing that *is* one hundred percent natural. We will pray together until it is easy for you to put your arms on the window sill of heaven and look into the

face of God.

"Before I put you back in your crib, I want to tell you something Philip said. We had been out in the country for a ride. It was evening and we ran out of gas. We were walking along after we had been to the farm house, and I was carrying a can of gas. Philip was only four. He was playing along, throwing rocks at the telephone poles, picking flowers, and then, all of a sudden it got dark. Sometimes night comes all at once in the country. Philip came over, put his little hand in mine and said, 'Take my hand, Daddy. I might get lost.'

"Peter, there is a hand reaching to you from the heart of the universe. If you will lay your hand in the hand of God and walk with Him, you will never ever get lost."

Hannah kept the promises that she had made to the Lord. How about you and me? Have we made vows and promises to God? Some of us made vows of church membership. We confessed Jesus as our Savior, our Lord. We would be loyal to the church and support it with our prayers, our presence, our gifts and our service. Some of us had children baptized. We promised God we would by teaching and example show them what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Many of us stood before the altar in a church on our wedding day, and promised to be faithful to our husband or wife for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part. Maybe at some point in life we were in a jam, in great need, and we promised God something if He would only help us and get us through.

Whatever the vows, whatever promises we've made to the Lord, have we kept them? *Hannah was a woman who kept the vows she made in sight of God!*

I began this message by saying that Hannah lived in a time of moral and spiritual confusion, where everyone did what was right *in their own eyes*. Isn't that, in many ways, a description of time in which we live? Our is what has been called a "postmodern world." One of the hallmarks of postmodernism is the conviction that there are no moral absolutes. There is no transcendent God who has laws and standards that are changeless. Each group has to decide for itself what's right and what's wrong. In this kind of climate, we need people like Hannah, women *and* men who are people of faith and prayer, who make promises to God, and keep them!

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
May 14, 2017*

