

Hannah

Heroes: Amazing Stories of Faith

1 Samuel 1:1-18

September 17, 2017

I love the way that God has given us so many wonderful stories in His Word about the ways that He has worked in His people's lives. There is so much we can learn and apply to our lives right now as we look at the different people in the Bible. Even those with flaws can be heroes.

Maybe you identify with Thomas as you wrestle with doubts sometimes. The wonderful end of the story is that the Jesus helped Thomas overcome those doubts!

Maybe you identify with Martha as you hustle about in the busyness and distractions of your life. The end of that story is that Jesus helped her understand the importance of focusing on Him.

Maybe you identify with Job as you deal with the losses in your life and the ongoing struggles that you are having. The awesome conclusion to that story is that, after all the testing he went through, God worked in Job's life in an amazing way, teaching him, restoring him, and showing His love and power to him.

There are all kinds of heroes in the Bible, people that we can learn from. For the next couple months, we are going to look at 8 heroes from the Bible – men and women who demonstrated courage and faith in difficult times. And we will learn important keys to being heroes of the faith in the difficult times we live in today.

Last week, we talked about David and his epic battle with Goliath. Today, we're going to look at the Old Testament woman Hannah. I invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin so that you can jot down some notes.

Now, if you are not familiar with Hannah in the Bible, she's only mentioned in two chapters at the beginning of the Old Testament book 1 Samuel. But she has become a heroine to so many who have felt the blessing of God has been held back from them.

In the years preceding her life as described in the Book of Judges – if you are reading the Bible in a Year schedule that we have on our website, then you know that during that time, the people were led by what were called judges – leaders from individual tribes. But once a leader died, the people would turn away from God and follow the idolatrous practices of the foreign peoples around them. Their attitude was simply this: the people did what they thought was good in their eyes.

They did what they thought was good in their eyes, not God's way or law, but what they thought was right. That's a huge problem, isn't it? You could go do whatever you thought was good, not what might be good for everyone else. Run that red light, not by accident, but because you wanted to. The folks in Camden know what happens when a traffic law isn't followed. What's good in our own eyes is rarely what's good in God's eyes or anyone else's lives.

Today's hero Hannah is introduced through her circumstances. She lives in the hill country of Ephraim a little north of Jerusalem. She seems to come from a good, godly family; you can tell that from names. Names were very important back then. Hannah's name means "grace." She marries a man by the name of Elkanah, whose name means "God has possessed." What a great name. "God has possessed."

Elkanah loves Hannah, but he went and did a fool thing: he married another woman as well. Her name was Peninnah, which means pearl. Peninnah seems to be a baby maker; she is able to have children, but Hannah was barren, childless. This was a great burden to Hannah. First, in Bible days, children were considered a great blessing from God¹, and to be childless was a great reproach for a woman.² Just as it is today to feel terrible pain for a woman to not be able to have a child, so it was with Hannah. Second, Peninnah taunted Hannah all the time and made life miserable for her. Peninnah was the kind that could not experience blessing (in her case the blessing of children) without becoming proud and insolent. She made fun of Hannah, especially when the family made their annual pilgrimage to Shiloh, the center of worship in those days. So worship was a time when Hannah would be more vulnerable to attack, because her adversary would mock her faith in God because Hannah was barren. Satan thrives in mocking where saints are suffering. He mocks their faith, for he would make them think that because they have faith, they ought to prosper in the world.³

Hannah's husband Elkanah tries to help her feel better. He gives her the best gifts. He tries to comfort her, but as husbands often do when they try to comfort their wives, they say something wrong to make it worse. Right ladies? Here's what Elkanah says,

"Why are you crying, Hannah?" Elkanah would ask. "Why aren't you eating? Why be downhearted just because you have no children? You have me—isn't that better than having ten sons?"⁴

I can hear the answer: no!

Hannah is facing a crisis, a huge obstacle, her giant if you will. And like all of our heroes in this series, she does something remarkable. David relied on God and his past; remember: Duties done in the doldrums result in triumphs in the troubles. Hannah relies on God and the power of prayer. In fact, she goes to the Tabernacle and cries out in prayer, and we see 9 things that I want you to write down. These 9 things are the way to pray when facing a crisis, a giant. Here' how you cry out in a hero prayer.

First, The Place of the Crying.

She went to the Tabernacle – the church – to pray. You can pray anywhere but there are some places more conducive to praying than other places.

There have been many times I've come to the church and prayed at the altar rail and laid my burdens before God. Sure God is everywhere, but there are places He seems to be much closer, and that's where Hannah goes to pray: to church.

Second, The Prudence in the Crying.

Hannah was wise go to God in prayer over her situation. Frequently, however, when troubles come, we do everything but pray and that only aggravates our troubles, not solves them.

Think about the trouble you had last week, or the one coming up this week, or the one that has vexed you for a long time. Are you praying, really praying about it.

Third, The Posture in the Crying.

¹ Psalm 127:3-5

² Luke 1:24, 25

³ Analytical Bible Expositor - Analytical Bible Expositor, 1 Samuel 1:2,5-8.

⁴ 1 Samuel 1:8 (NLT)

Hannah took a very humble posture in praying. Three times in this text she refers to herself as a servant. She completely humbles herself before the Lord.

When you cry out in prayer, don't think of yourself highly and of all you've accomplished; that is the exact opposite of the kind of prayer God listens to. God does not heed the prayer of the proud, but listens to the prayer of the humble.

Fourth, The Passion in the Crying.

Hannah prayed earnestly. Verse 10 says she was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the LORD. She made a vow in verse 11. Verse 13 indicates that she didn't pray in her head; she was so passionate that the words of the prayer were on her mouth. Verse 15 says she poured her soul out to God.

Have you ever prayed like that? With such passion and so hard that the words were on your mouth? That you poured your heart out to God?

Fifth, The Persistency in the Crying.

Verse 12 indicates she kept on praying. Persistency is not vain repetition but is the spirit that will not give up before God.

Jesus affirms this kind of praying. He told this story in Luke 11:

*"Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' 'Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs. 'So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.'*⁵

So, friends, be persistent in your prayer.

Sixth, The Petition in the Crying.

Hannah prays for a specific request: a son. Not just a baby, but a son.

So many of our prayers miscarry because they are aimed at no special goal. F. B. Meyer once said, "We launch them aimlessly in the air, and wonder that they achieve nothing."

Often, we pray generally as a way to hedge our prayer. "God, help them." And God says, "Help them how?" We need to pray specifically.

Seventh, The Promise in the Crying.

Hannah made some heroic promises to God in this prayer. Verse 11:

*And she made this vow: "O LORD of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the LORD, his hair will never be cut."*⁶

She promises to give her son to God. Imagine that. The very thing she has wanted all her life, she is willing to give it back to God. Hannah wanted her child to serve God and promised she would do her part to fulfill that desire. Many parents do not want their children in Christian service. They want them to be prosperous or famous but not a lowly servant of God.

Hannah promises to give her son back to God in service to Him.

⁵ Luke 11:5-9 (NIV)

⁶ 1 Samuel 1:11 (NLT)

Eight, The Perverting of the Crying.

The priest Eli started to notice this woman praying, but instead of seeing passion and fervor, he sees something else. He thinks she's drunk. Eli was not a very good judge of appearances, but he was not a good man either. His uncalled for accusation reflects on the evil of Eli not on the evil of Hannah.

Verse 14-16:

*"Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!" "Oh no, sir!" she replied. "I haven't been drinking wine or anything stronger. But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the LORD. Don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow."*⁷

OBEDIENCE IS REQUIRED FOR ANSWERED PRAYER.

Finally, we see The Peace After the Crying.

The praying ended with peace in Hannah's heart. Verses 17-18:

*"In that case," Eli said, "go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him." "Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad.*⁸

Eli's statement helped to encourage Hannah after she had prayed. The NRSV says that her countenance was no more sad. Not only was her heart at peace, but her very expression showed the change, too. Her appetite came back. This proves the genuineness of the peace. And this peace was not temporary but a lasting peace.

The doctor told Marsha Mark and her husband they would never have biological children. In their disappointment, Marsha clung to a friend's words: "Somehow, God is going to use your struggle with infertility for his glory." Marsha began to pray for a glimpse of that glory.

"I asked everyone I knew to pray," she said. "One five-year-old prayed, 'Dear God, please send Marsha a baby. Maybe someone could give her one, or she could just find one on the street.'"

Marsha's husband, Tom, a scientist, stopped praying when Marsha showed signs of menopause. Tom had seen lots of data. And in his lifetime, he'd never seen prayer change scientific facts.

Six months later, Marsha made an appointment for another pregnancy test. The doctor said no because Marsha hadn't had a period for seven months. "Asking for another pregnancy test indicates you are not accepting things as they are," he said. Marsha begged for the extra test anyway. And it came back positive.

Marsha said, "Over the next fourteen days, I had four more pregnancy tests and three more sonograms at the hospital's request. I think this time the doctor was having trouble dealing with the facts."

Her full-term pregnancy was uneventful. On October 22, 1996, Amanda Joy was born. They call her "Miracle Mandy."⁹

What are you praying for? What place are you praying that prayer? Are you prudent and going to God first and only? What is your posture: prideful or humble? Do you pray passionately? Are you persistent in your prayer? Are you specific in your

⁷ 1 Samuel 1:14-16 (NLT)

⁸ 1 Samuel 1:17-18 (NLT)

⁹ Marsha Marks, "Special Delivery," Christian Reader (September--October 2000) Larson, C. B., & Ten Elshof, P. (2008). 1001 illustrations that connect (313). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

petition? Is there a promise of yours in that prayer? Do you let anything pervert your prayer? Do you have peace after you've prayed? If not, you haven't prayed yet.

Max Lucado has written this:

“God honors radical, risk-taking faith.

When arks are built, lives are saved.

When soldiers march, Jerichos tumble.

When staffs are raised, seas still open.

When a lunch is shared, thousands are fed.

And when a garment is touched – whether by the hand of an anemic woman in Galilee or by the prayers of a beggar in Bangladesh – Jesus stops.

He stops and responds.”

Many great women in the Bible experienced childlessness for an extended period of time. Sarah, Isaac's mother; Rachel, Joseph's mother; and Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother; along with Hannah, Samuel's mother, all had been barren a long time before they bore their famous sons. The character of their famous sons says quality is better than quantity.

Hannah is a hero, an amazing story of faith.