

Series Title: Shepherd, Poet, Fugitive, King-The Life of David

Message Title: "The Lord of Armies!" Hannah's Desperate Prayer / Jeff Kennedy / Sept. 3, 2023

Psa 34:4-7 I sought the LORD, and he answered me and rescued me from all my fears. ⁵ Those who look to him are radiant with joy; their faces will never be ashamed. ⁶ This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him from all his troubles. ⁷ The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and rescues them.

Introduction: The 1950's brought significant change and progress from the eras of the Great Depression and WWII. The GI Bill facilitated education and homeownership for returning veterans, fueling economic growth and middle-class expansion. This period was marked by prosperity, the baby boom, consumerism and convenience, medical advancements, suburbanization, a vision of space exploration, and Civil Rights progress for minorities and women.

However, life in 1950s America shared similarities with the prior decades.

- Gender roles and social norms, notably voting rights for women and minorities remained largely unchanged.
- Racial tensions persisted, with segregation and discrimination ingrained.
- While television transformed leisure, technology like phones, radios, and appliances had already existed, and rural areas continued to lack access.
- Family dynamics shifted subtly due to suburbanization, while core values stayed consistent.

Despite its continuity with the previous decades, this era is often remembered as a general decade of optimism.

Transition: Similarly, in this new series on the life of David: "Shepherd, Poet, Fugitive, King" it will feel at times as though we are reading a continuation of Judges. Once again, we'll see men abusing and taking advantage of women, wives betrayed by husbands, wayward children gone off the rails, corrupt religion, conspiracies to murder, dysfunctional families, deceitful politicians, power struggles, and the horrors of war.

But there is something different in these books—and we can't help but notice it. It seems like the world has new promise. Amidst Israel's darkness there is renewed optimism that the people of God will soon be united under one King, one God, and as one nation.

And it all starts with the story of Ruth (which we finished last week) and Hannah which we will cover this week and next.

Scripture: 1 Sam. 1:1-8 There was a man from Ramathaim-zophim in the hill country of Ephraim. His name was El'kanah son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ² He had two wives, the first named Hannah and the second

Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless. ³ This man would go up from his town every year to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of Armies at Shiloh, where Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were the Lord's priests.

⁴ Whenever El'kanah offered a sacrifice, he always gave portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to each of her sons and daughters. ⁵ But he gave a double portion to Hannah, for he loved her even though the Lord had kept her from conceiving. ⁶ Her rival would taunt her severely just to provoke her, because the Lord had kept Hannah from conceiving. ⁷ Year after year, when she went up to the Lord's house, her rival taunted her in this way. Hannah would weep and would not eat. ⁸ "Hannah, why are you crying?" her husband, El'kanah, would ask. "Why won't you eat? Why are you troubled? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"

Wow. When you don't know what to say, definitely say the wrong thing.

We'll see three things in this story today: (1) Hannah's desperation. (2) Hannah's devotion. (3) Hannah's determination.

1. Hannah was desperate.

What were the causes of her despair?

She was barren and unable to have children.

- **Patrilineal world**/only males could inherit property/and that typically fell to the firstborn (right of primogeniture).
- **Barrenness**, generally speaking, was considered in the ancient world to be a curse while fruitfulness and fertility were considered to be a divine blessing. Throughout Scripture, barrenness/infertility is an analogy of the spiritually bankrupt condition of Israel.
- **Hannah has a natural desire** for children. She's a loving wife with an urge to have kids. We learned last week from pastor Daniel that God's eternal plan is set into motion and accomplished through the normal and natural course of childbearing. ***Hannah has reached an age where a metabolic urge to have children has kicked in.***

But Hannah has more problems...

She lived in a polygamous marriage.

- In the ancient world, Polygamy (one man having many wives) was tolerated but only among the wealthy and important. It was also heavily regulated—particularly in the gentile/pagan cultures (Assyria, Babylonia, Anatolia).
- **Notice El'kanah's Response to her...**that he should be enough for her—
- Jesus, in a discussion with the Sadducees established that God's gold standard was one man and one wife *for life!* (Matt. 22).

As a result of this polygamous relationship...

She was tormented by a domestic rival.

- These relationships often become **competitive environments** where individual wives are vying for the **affection** and **attention** of the one man. And that is exactly what happens in Hannah's home.
- Hannah is being taunted and provoked by Penninah—El'kanah's 2nd wife. He likely married Penninah because Hannah was infertile. But El'kanah has a special place in his heart for Hannah.

I think the application we draw from this is...

Application: The catalyst for our growth is frequently found in the source of our discomfort. The things that make us uncomfortable are often the things that push us to grow. No doubt, Hannah is **experiencing heartache leading to her despair**. She is desperate to make the pain stop. But this provocation is the means by which she goes to the next level in her faith.

Let me ask you: What's provoking you right now? What's the bur in your saddle? Have you stopped to consider that the very thing that is vexing you, the very thing that is irritating and aggravating you is the means of God's work in you—to draw us closer to him, make us more dependent on him??

The very source of your provocation can be God's stimulus for growth and maturity and an intensity in our devotion to Jesus.

The second thing we note from the story is that...

2. Hannah was devout. Her uncommon devotion is a key feature of this account. Let's read on...

Let's pick up the story in verse 10: On one occasion, Hannah ***got up after they ate and drank at Shiloh***. The priest Eli was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the Lord's temple. ¹⁰ ***Deeply hurt, Hannah prayed*** to the Lord and wept with many tears. ¹¹ ***Making a vow, she pleaded***, "Lord of Armies, if you will take notice of your servant's affliction, remember and not forget me, and give your servant a son, I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and his hair will never be cut." ¹² While she continued praying in the Lord's presence, Eli watched her mouth. ¹³ Hannah was praying silently, and though her lips were moving, her voice could not be heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴ and said to her, "How long are you going to be drunk? Get rid of your wine!" ⁵ "No, my lord," Hannah replied. "I am a woman with a broken heart. I haven't had any wine or beer; I've been ***pouring out my heart before the Lord***. ¹⁶ Don't think of me as a wicked woman; I've been ***praying from the depth of my anguish and resentment***." ¹⁷ Eli responded, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant the request you've made of him." ¹⁸ "May your servant find favor with you," she replied. Then Hannah went on her way; she ate and no ***longer looked despondent***.

Everyone in the story has pierced her heart with their words.

- **El'kanah** essentially tells her to get over it, he's enough for her.
- **Peninnah** intentionally torments her by rubbing her good fortune and blessings in Hannah's face.
- **Eli the priest**, assumes that her prayers are drunkenness and chastises her for excess.

Hannah has every reason to be angry—she has every excuse to allow her heart to turn cold, to become bitter, to live out her days in the emptiness of resentment toward others.

But she doesn't. Instead...

She seeks God's presence. She went to the "house" of the Lord in **Shiloh**... This is *bet YHWH*. She did the only thing she knew to do. She sought the presence of the Lord. And at this time the presence of God was localized in a place, in Shiloh. The text reveals that they are already religiously devout and compliant. They go to Shiloh where the Ark is. They attend the feasts prescribed by Moses and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded.

But there is an added dimension to her faith that is on display here. *The text says that she “got up.”* Her need moved her to action—to pray fervently and deeply from the heart. She has to do what no one else at the festival needs to do—carve out some space and time to seek the face of God.

She prays bold prayers. She addresses God as *Yahweh Seb’ayot*—meaning “The Lord of Hosts, the Lord of Armies.” She could have addressed him as El Shaddai—the God Almighty. Or by any other Hebrew name. But she knows that she is in a battle—and when you’re in a fight and you’re surrounded by uncaring, insensitive people—who are draining, life-sucking, forces of nature—you need the Lord of Armies. You need the God who does battle for you.

She prays fervently from the depths of the heart. *A few times in my life I can say that I have prayed where my words were my tears, and God’s presence has left me speechless.* And she is mouthing the words from the heart but no sounds are coming out. After Eli rebukes her she corrects him, “I am here pouring out all that is in my heart to God. From the depths of my despair, my resentment, my anxieties. Now, to Eli’s credit, once he is corrected he reverses his attitude and blesses her.

What is our application today from this?

Application: The key to addressing our discouragement lies in personal, public, passionate, and persistent prayers. She discovers that the key to her encouragement and the lifting of our countenance is through prayer. She receives consolation even before God renders a verdict and answers her prayer.

Before God answers your prayer, PRAYER is the answer to your heartache, your desperation—it’s the means through which God consoles you and lifts your spirit.

I admit, I am so prone to think that I’ll only be encouraged if God takes the discomfort away. If he answers my prayer and takes this vexing thing away. But it is through persistent prayer.

Jesus taught the disciples a parable so that they might always pray and never give up. The parable of the persistent widow. *Ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking. Knock and keep on knocking.*

There is an intensely personal aspect to Hannah’s prayers. She is literally there practicing formal religion—the festivals. But she gets up because she senses the need to go beyond the formal art of religion and to express the despair and resentment in her heart.

And yet, she has chosen to pray these intensely personal prayers at the tabernacle gate, where she can easily be spotted by Eli and his sons. Her prayers aren't stilted, or rehearsed, or scripted, her prayer is a passionate plea for mercy from the heart.

- **It's the kind of prayer we see in Luke 22:44**—as the hours passed in Gethsemane Jesus prayed more fervently, as great drops of blood fell from his brow.
- **In Romans 12:11**—Paul tells the Romans to never lack zeal, but to be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.
- **James 5:16** “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (KJV).

What does this mean?

We pray for our kids and grandkids, and we don't give up.

We pray for God's will in our lives, and we keep on praying.

We pray for relief for the heart, both personally and publicly—being fervent in Spirit as we seek the Lord.

Before God answers any of her prayers we see that prayer itself is the means through which God addresses the aching heart.

3. Hannah's determination to fulfill her vow. Well, the rest of the story is that Hannah conceives a son, sh'muel— (*shema and el*) meaning "God hears"—this little boy is the visible manifestation of the fact that God heard the desperate cry of her heart. We pick the story up at verse twenty... 1 Samuel 1:20–28 After some time, Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, because she said, "I requested him from the LORD." ²¹ When El'kanah and all his household went up to make the annual sacrifice and his vow offering to the LORD, ²² Hannah did not go and explained to her husband, "After the child is weaned, I'll take him to appear in the LORD's presence and to stay there permanently." ²³ Her husband, El'kanah, replied, "Do what you think is best, and stay here until you've weaned him. May the LORD confirm your word." So Hannah stayed there and nursed her son until she weaned him. ²⁴ When she had weaned him, she took him with her to Shiloh, as well as a three-year-old bull, half a bushel of flour, and a clay jar of wine. Though the boy was still young, she took him to the LORD's house at Shiloh. ²⁵ Then they slaughtered the bull and brought the boy to Eli. ²⁶ **"Please, my lord," she said, "as surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD.** ²⁷ I prayed for this boy, and since the LORD gave me what I asked him for, ²⁸ I now give the boy to the LORD. For as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD." Then he worshiped the LORD there.

She is resolved to follow through on her commitments. She doesn't have to pray about it, she doesn't think, "Well maybe I was rash" and then rationalize that the LORD really does want the baby boy to grow up with him mommy.

I am struck by Hannah's unblinking and unflinching follow through.

Application: Faithfulness is the art of transforming our good intentions into steadfast actions.

We all want to be judged as having been faithful to our calling. But the distance between your stated intentions and faithfulness is bridged by your follow through.

Illus. The Children of Israel began their journey into the desert with a commitment. Moses had gone up to Sinai to receive instructions from the LORD as to how to lead the people. And in Exodus 19:8 "Then all the people responded together, 'We will do all that the Lord has spoken.'" They began their journey of faith with a commitment. But then they didn't do all the Lord had

spoken. Quite the opposite. They reverted to Egyptian longings—idols and food and accoutrements. They became obstinate, faithless, idolaters who died in the wilderness and never saw the promised land of Canaan.

Reflecting on their example, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:5 ***“Nevertheless God was not pleased with them, as most of them were struck down in the wilderness.”*** Paul could render this judgment on them because they failed to follow through on their promises.

Illustration: Jesus’ disciples abandoned him on at least two occasions we know of. The most dramatic occasion recorded in John 6:59ff. Jesus noticed that the masses of people following him, clamoring for him, were motivated by the fish and the bread. They kept coming back to him because he fed them. He then turns to them saying, “You’ve all come to me because you got your bellies full. But unless you eat/partake of the flesh and the blood you have no communion with me.” They were astonished. How could they follow a teacher who said such radical things? And a great number of followers left Jesus.

Jesus turns to his disciples (the 12) and asks, “Are you also going to leave me?” “Lord,” they said, “To whom would we turn? You have the very words of life.”

What about you?

You said you believed in Jesus, so trust his Word.

You said you would follow Jesus’ teachings so pattern your life after them.

You said you would love and worship God above all else, so love him and smash your idols.

In the theater of faithfulness, good intentions may set the stage but follow through steals the show.

Hannah, like her ancestor Abraham, is a shining example of reflexive, unflinching follow-through on her commitments. And she is judged by the nation as a faithful woman and her story is enshrined in Hebrew Scripture forever.

Let’s put it all together:

The stimulus for our growth is frequently found in the very thing that provokes us.

What’s aggravating you today? How might God work through that to stimulate you to maturity and growth in Christ?

Contrary to our instinct to avoid discomfort, we do not primarily find relief and consolation in the answers to our prayers (though yes' certainly help)—but our souls are encouraged, and our countenances lifted through persistent, personal, public, and passionate prayers from the heart.

What discomfort are you facing today that requires you to get up, and get moving closer to God in prayer?

And let's remember that the distance between our intentions and being declared a good and faithful servant is closed by our follow through—sustained effort to keep moving forward.

How are you moving in the direction of steadfast action?