

Scripture: Luke 1:46-55 And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ because he has looked with favor on the humble condition of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, ⁴⁹ because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and his name is holy. ⁵⁰ His mercy is from generation to generation on those who fear him. ⁵¹ He has done a mighty deed with his arm; he has scattered the proud because of the thoughts of their hearts; ⁵² he has toppled the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly. ⁵³ He has satisfied the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering his mercy ⁵⁵ to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he spoke to our ancestors. **This song is the fulfillment of another song we'll read about today—the song of Hannah.**

The book of Judges ends with the world descending into violence and chaos—the book concludes with a time when “**there was no king in Israel, and everyone did what seemed right to them**” ([Judges 21:25](#)). At this point Israel is rudderless—adrift in immorality and idolatry. And God has to begin a new era by sending a Moses-like leader who embodies all three leadership roles in Israel: Prophet, Priest, and King.

The story of Samuel begins quietly, humbly; it begins with the faithful prayer of a woman who wants to be a mother.

Elkanah has two wives: **Peninnah** and **Hannah**. Peninnah has many children whereas Hannah remained barren.

The Message? The key to a life of sustained Joy is being able to stand firm in our faith even though the trials we face threaten to rob us daily of that joy.

And this story introduces God's solution to Humanity's problem—Samuel is a prototype—both of David and David's Son, Jesus.

1 Sam. 1:4-8 Whenever Elkanah 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, Elkanah, 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.

Let's make some observations from this timeless story.

1. In a difficult situation, Hannah despaired. As is the case with most biblical narratives, the story has undergone a great deal of **literary compression**. Her season of suffering was likely **prolonged**. We get a sense from the story that **something's got to give**. Sometimes, the best prayers are born out of the deepest longings of the heart—a heart that is troubled, despairing, where our situation has robbed us of any joy in life.

In the story we see that...

She was infertile in an inhospitable world. 1 Sam 1:2b “but Hannah had no 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.
- **Hannah has a natural desire** for children. She's a loving wife with a **metabolic urge** to have kids.

She shared a husband with a spiteful rival. 1:6 “And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her.”

- **In the ancient world, Polygamy** (one man having many wives) was tolerated but only among the wealthy and prominent. It was also heavily regulated—particularly in the gentile/pagan cultures (Assyria, Babylonia, Anatolia).
- **Polygamy was tolerated in the earliest biblical texts in order to propagate the species.** There's a certain point where God deems it necessary, to preserve the genetic viability of the race. And there's a point in history where God decides “that's not good for gene pool anymore.” Listen, *God's last word on any matter is his most relevant word.*
- **Jesus, in a discussion with the Sadducees established that God's gold standard** was one man and one wife *for life!* (Matt. 22).
- **Hannah is being taunted and tormented by Penninah**—Elkanah's 2nd wife. He likely married Penninah because Hannah was infertile. She is giving birth and rubbing it in Hannah's face.

She reminds us of who God is. 1:3, 11 “And she vowed and said, ‘O Lord of hosts.’” This is the first time in the entire OT where the phrase **YHWH Se'Ba'ot**, meaning “The LORD of Armies,” יהוה צבא' occurs 265 times in the OT often referring to God as the Sovereign God who is a warrior king. **Later, when David faces Goliath, he will say “You come at me with a mere sword and spear and javelin—but I come to you in the name of the Lord of War—the God who does battle for Israel.”** In the midst of her struggle Hannah falls back on her theology. She knows who God is. She knows her Bible. The foundation of her faith is God himself—God is faithful to his promises, and he is Sovereign over all.

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

2. Despite her circumstances, Hannah remained devoted to God. Her uncommon devotion is a key feature of this account. Notwithstanding the fact that she feels abandoned, she's actively taunted by her domestic rival, and men all around are being generally knuckleheaded—she remains faithfully devoted to her God.

1:9-14 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!”

Are you getting the sense that the men in this story, just always say the wrong thing?

Illus. During Kerri's ordeal with cancer, in the midst of it someone handed me a note that basically excoriated me, just shredded me for not being a very good husband to Kerri in the midst of her suffering.

Ever felt kicked in the ribs with a size 12 steel toe boot when you were down?

It is human nature to want to solve a problem, or give advice, or address a situation and just blunder into it—saying the wrong thing. And when life is going awry, and the people around you are kicking when you're down—you feel every justification to go sideways...lean into your faith.

But see her response...

Hannah has every reason to be angry over her desperate situation.

Hannah has every reason to be jealous—to be eaten alive with envy over her domestic adversary, Penninah.

She has every justification to become resentful and bitter. Bitterness is the poison we mean for others that we swallow ourselves.

She seeks God's presence. 1:9 “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.

- **Shiloh** becomes the real estate where the tabernacle (a mobile shrine) takes semi-permanent residence. It's the place where God's presence is manifest and where a devout Jew goes at least 3 times a year for festivals and sacrifice.
- Her prayers are **personal** and **passionate**—and **puzzling** to Eli. The priest Eli thinks she's bombed. She defends herself “I am not sloshed. I am pouring out my heart to the Lord...deeply vexed and troubled in spirit.”

- She **promised** to give her firstborn literally to the temple in service to the Lord. She had no guarantees that her son would be treated well or with kindness. She released him into the hands of a corrupt and inept priesthood.

She prays through her grief and her resentment (v.15-16). Eli, assuming she is hammered and incoherent barks out an insensitive word. 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.”

- **She actively prays through her grief and anger.** Folks, this is how we make it through. This is how we work through the trauma and tragedy of loss—in our grief, and anger, and resentment—we put one foot in front of the other.
- **It is possible to sin against God and others when we face anger, loss, or grief.** But don’t think for one second that taking the time to work through your anger, your loss and grief is sinful. She says, “don’t think of me as a wicked person—here’s what I’m doing, praying through my anguish and resentment.”

Listen, devotion to God doesn’t mean the absence of anger, or heartache, or resentment.

Rom 8: In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us^[j] with inexpressible groanings. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸ We know that all things work together^[k] for the good^[l] of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Recap: Hannah finds herself in a desperate situation, barren in a cruel world—yet, she reminds us of who God is—Yahweh the warrior.

Hannah remains devoted to God—she prays through her grief with inexpressible words.

3. Hannah delighted in God.

Well, the rest of the story is that Hannah conceives a son, sh'muel— (*shema and el*) meaning “one heard by God”—this little boy is the living testament to God hearing the desperate cry of her heart.

See her response is one of almost inexpressible joy.

I love the way the ancient Hebrews packed their theology into their poetry and songs.

Her worship is from the heart. 2:1 “And Hannah prayed and said, ‘My heart exults in the Lord; my horn is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.’”

Her heart swells with gratitude—her dreams have been realized. She rejoices, the Hebrew word *aw'latz—meaning* to jump for joy—to leap in praise.

Her worship is informed—based on truth. Hannah’s song becomes a theology lesson. Memorialized as inspired text.

- **Greatness of God:** 2:2-3 “There is **none holy** like the Lord: for there is **none besides you**; there is **no rock like our God**.³ Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for the **Lord is a God of knowledge**, and by him actions are weighed.” She affirms God’s oneness and uniqueness. She affirms God’s vast and intimate knowledge of the hearts of men. She acknowledges two of the pillars of Hebrew religion—the uniqueness and wisdom of God.
- **Reversal of Fortunes:** 2:7-8 “The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts.⁸ He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor. For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's and on them he has set the world.” Her praise acknowledges that God reverses fortunes, he changes circumstances.
- **Future King:** 2:10 “The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to **his king** and exalt the horn of his **anointed**.” Hannah is likely prophesying the coming Kingdom of David, but if she is, it’s a dual sense prophecy—she used the Hebrew word *mashiach*. Meaning, anointed King. **Hannah knows her Torah**, she’s paid attention at the annual feasts when the High Priest has read the books of Moses.

Gen. 17—God prophesied to Abraham that a line of Kings would come from him.

Dt. 17:15 –God told the people that in the future he would set a King over them—one of his choosing.

Hannah knows her Scriptures. God is going to choose a meshiach—an anointed king.

The Song of Mary we read at the beginning of this message is the fulfillment of Hannah's answered prayer. "My soul doth magnify the LORD!" Because God has sent a king—and his arrival is cause for great joy. And we celebrate Jesus today, sometimes in the midst of unrelenting anguish in our hearts.

Her worship sustained her. It kept her from falling into incurable despair. It sustained her when she was without any child.

Illus. In his book, *The Dance of Hope*, William Frey tells the story about a young man named John who was blind—whom he tutored at the University of Colorado. William asked him how he came to lose his sight, and the young man recalled an accident when he was a boy. The accident was so traumatic that it took not only his sight, but all sense of joy in life. He told William, "I was bitter and angry with God for letting it happen, and I took my anger out on everyone around me. I felt that since I had no future, I wouldn't lift a finger on my own behalf. Let others wait on me. I shut my bedroom door and refused to come out except for meals." Will Frey pressed him on that—John credited his father. His father recognized that it was time for John to move forward. To regain his confidence. So he gave him what seemed to be an impossible task—to take the ladder in the garage and go around the house installing and cleaning the storm windows. In a very matter of fact fashion his father told him to do the work before he got home from work.

John lashed out in anger. Cursing under his breath all the way to the garage, he found the storm windows, the stepladder and tools and went to work. He thought, "They'll be sorry when I fall off my ladder and break my neck." **Not only did he not fall, he finished the chore. And he felt good about it. That one chore helped John to realize that he could still work;** from that moment he began to rebuild his life. As he finished the story his sightless eyes became teary, **"I later discovered that at no time during the day had my father ever been more than four or five feet from my side."** He was never alone and in no real danger of falling. His sense of self-worth, and joy came back into his life because the Father whom he couldn't see was always there watching over him.

John's purpose in life was restored—and along with that—his sense of joy.

The key to a life of sustained joy is that we know that God is near, and God's Spirit lives within us—he upholds us by his grace.

Jesus's brother, Jude said it this way...

Jude vv. 24 (NET) "Now to the one who is able to keep you from falling, and to cause you to stand, rejoicing, without blemish before his glorious presence"

Hannah teaches us today that when circumstances drain us of the joy of life—we can lean into God's presence and worship him for who he is and what he's going to do.