

The Power of Prayer

[1 Samuel 1:4-20](#)

Today let's take a look at prayer. This seems like such a basic principle for Christians. We are taught that prayer is our primary line of communication to God. We come together and join in prayer as we remember those who are sick or hurt or discouraged, and we pray for our community and our country's leaders. At times we pray in desperation as Hannah did. Our scripture lesson from I Samuel tells how just desperate she was and how fervently she prayed in the Temple.

We are told that Hannah was barren. We have talked about life during Hannah's time, and how important it was for a woman to be able to bear children, particularly male children. Another interesting pattern seems to be noted. When a woman was barren and then was able to bear a child, often that child was very special as we will see with Hannah's child. So we find

Hannah barren for many years, to the point where she refused to eat. The text is not clear on whether or not she was fasting, but it does seem clear her heart was weary and she was seeking answers from God.

The text tells us Hannah presented herself before the Lord. The place for her to do this was at the Temple. She literally poured out her sorrow to God, crying out in her despair. At times perhaps we have made these prayers as well. We get to the point where we just cannot see the path to take, or the decision to make, or we are praying out of our suffering or the suffering of others. Maybe our anger leads the way; nevertheless, we cry out to God in prayer as Hannah did.

Hannah prayed to God for a male child. She also made a deal with God. If God would grant her request, she would in turn dedicate that child back to God. For us today, that is

exactly what we do in baptism – we bring the child before God and community and vow to raise the child in the Christian faith; hence we are dedicating our child to God. But for Hannah, in her time dedicating a child to God meant literally giving the child to the priests of the Temple to be raised as a priest. We are told later that Hannah was only able to see her child once a year. So her deal with God was literal – You give me a son, and I will give him back to you.

I wonder if we have ever made a deal with God? Have we ever said, ‘God, if you get me out of this one....’ I’ll leave the rest unsaid! Maybe we make deals concerning a situation we find ourselves in, or a financial loss we have to face. We may say something like, “God, I promise I’ll never do that again.” Hopefully we remember those promises after the event has

passed. Hannah's promise was actually saying that if God were to give her a son, she would give him back to God's service.

While Hannah was there in the Temple, the priest Eli was also there, and he misunderstood Hannah's desperate prayer as the result of her being drunk. Here we see Hannah's determination as she explained her state of prayer in the face of a perceived insult. Eli tells Hannah that she should be ashamed of herself and to put away her wine. But Hannah sets the record straight by telling him of her desperation and determination in her prayer. I believe Eli's eyes were open to the truth at this point. Eli seemed to adjust his thinking as he extended a blessing and a hope for an answer to Hannah's prayer.

After Hannah left the Temple, she was in a very different state. It seems she felt a burden was lifted from her. Verse 18 says, "Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with

her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.” She left her burden and her prayer with God.

I think we can learn some lessons from Hannah concerning prayer. First, she went to seek God where she knew God would be. For Hannah, that was the Temple. Several of the Hebrew scriptures talk about God’s presence in the Temple. For us, maybe we know that God is with us always, yet it may be helpful to find a quiet place to seek God. Maybe it is in the church, or some place at home, or anyplace where we can present ourselves before God and listen for God’s response. Wherever that is for us, we need to seek out God in prayer.

Second, Hannah made her petition to God. She prayed for a child even though God already knew she was barren. Hannah displayed her faith in God to help her through this difficult time by reaching out to God and asking for what she needed. We too

need to put our faith in action. We need to seek out God and specify what we need. We too need to extend our faith and make our petition to God.

Third, Hannah trusted God to take her burden. We see that when Hannah left the Temple she was no longer crying out in desperation. She was no longer sad. She went home and returned to eating with her husband, which she had abstained from before. She left her prayer in the hands of Almighty God. We too need to take this lesson to heart. When we pray to God, we need to leave that burden with God. All too often perhaps we are too quick to snatch that burden back and try to solve it ourselves – I know I struggle with this. At times I have had to work on my patience as well as my faith to avoid snatching back a burden I had just left with God. It can be extremely hard to

take a burden to God and leave it there. That is our challenge and our lesson from Hannah – leave our burdens with God.

The final point I think we can learn from Hannah's story is this: prayer is a two-way conversation. All too often we may be a little quick to end a pray before we have taken the time to listen for God's response. We can talk to God through prayer, and God can respond to us through prayer. Let us not neglect the principle of listening for God's response. It can be like those times when you get caught on the phone with someone and you can't even get a word in! You could easily set the phone down for five minutes and the other person would not even notice! If we take the time to listen for God's response, perhaps we can then find the peace Hannah felt as she left the Temple knowing God heard and acknowledged her prayer.

So how's our listening? It may be hard to believe but the skill of listening is a difficult one for most people. I know in my business life, it was rare indeed to find a good listener. Most were interested in being the message senders instead of the message recipients. Can we listen for God's response? Can we find that quiet meditation where we make our petition to God and truly listen for a response?

God does answer prayer. At times it may seem God is not there – that we pray and never get an answer. We don't know the whole picture from God's point-of-view, but I believe if we put our faith in God, God will answer. In the end, Hannah did conceive and bear a son, and she did indeed dedicate her son Samuel back to God as she had promised. May God provide us with the strength and faith to seek God in prayer, make our petition to God, leave our burden with God, and find the

patience and skill to listen for God's response. May God
continue to bless us together as a community of faith in this
world. Amen.