

Fil-Am Community Church

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“HANNAH – KEEPING YOUR FAITH ALIVE”

Good morning! We're continuing our series entitled “Heroes”. We've looked at some heroes in the Bible who are not headline-grabbers in the mold of Abraham, Moses, David, and Paul. Heroes who we don't pay much attention to. So, we looked at the examples of Gideon, Samson, and Caleb. Note that these are all men. Do we have women heroes in the Bible, too? Certainly we do. When we think of heroines in the Bible, the ones that come to mind are Esther, Ruth, Rahab, and Mary.

Now, Ruth as we know became the wife of Boaz from whose lineage came the messiah, the Lord Jesus. But what kind of a man was he before he met Ruth? He was ruthless!

Ok, I'm not going to talk about any of these famous women of the Bible. I'm going to talk about someone who many of us recognize but never really thought how she could be a heroine. Aside from the fact that she offered her son to God, what else can we learn from her life? Plenty! In fact, as we study her life, we find answers to questions like “How do you maintain your stability in your changing circumstances? How do you maintain your

sanity in a crazy world? How can you keep on believing that there's hope in the midst of crises? How can you trust God when troubles assail you?"

So, this morning let us learn from the life of Hannah. As we go through the first chapter in 1 Samuel, we're going to see what principles we can glean from her life that will keep our faith alive in the midst of severe trials. As we examine this chapter I would like us to pay close attention to four attitudes based on four verses and four characteristics in the life of Hannah that will help you to keep your faith alive.

Let me share with you then these four attitudes.

1. Recognize God's power is greater than your problems (vs 1-8)

1 Samuel 1:1-8 *"There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite ^[a] from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ² He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.*

³ Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. ⁴ Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵ But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. ⁶ And because the LORD had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. ⁷ This went on year

after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. ⁸ Elkanah her husband would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

In verses 1-8 we find that Hannah had a real problem. Just like any of us. I remember the story of a mother who shared her problems with her son who was away at college. She wrote,

"Dear Son,

Just a few lines to let you know that I am still alive. I'm writing this letter slowly because I know that you cannot read very fast.

You won't know the house when you come home... We've moved. About your father...he has a lovely job. He has 500 men under him. He is cutting the grass at the cemetery.

There was a washing machine in the new house when we moved in, but it isn't working too good. Last week I put fourteen shirts into it, pushed down the little lever, and I haven't seen the shirts since.

Your sister mary had a baby this morning. I haven't found out whether it is a boy or girl, so I don't know whether you are an aunt or uncle.

It rained only twice last week; first for three days, and then for four days.

We had a letter yesterday from the undertaker. He said if the last installment isn't paid on your grandmother within seven days, "up she comes."

Your loving mother.

P.S. I was going to send you \$50.00 but I had already sealed the envelope.”

That woman has a problem! Going back to Hannah, we find that she was facing a big problem. She was barren. She couldn't conceive and it greatly disturbed her. To begin with we find that Elkanah had two wives. Hannah was one and the other was named Peninnah. Polygamy was quite common in biblical times. However, it was never approved of by God.

How many of you wives today would have a problem with your husband having more than one wife? This, however, was not Hannah's problem. Hannah's problem was that Peninnah had children but she didn't.

Now, I am sure that some mothers right now are saying to themselves, "That's a problem? My problem is that I have children." But you see, during biblical days women didn't consider it a problem or an inconvenience to have children, but rather they felt it was a curse not to have children. In Hannah's day it was considered a blessing to have children.

That's why the Psalmist says in Psalm 127:3-4 , *“Behold, children are a gift of the lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth.”*

In verse 6 we find the reason why Hannah didn't have any children. The reason was because "the Lord had closed her womb".

The verse doesn't give us the reason why God closed her womb. But it would seem as though he did this so that Hannah would have to depend upon him.

Isn't this the same way God works in our lives today? He gives us a problem that we can't solve but then like rats in a maze we first try one way and then another to escape, until we finally realize that we can't solve the problem on our own; and that's exactly where God wants us. When we come to this point we have a choice. We can give up and decide to live with the problem, or we can recognize that God is greater than our problems and that he can solve them.

God gave Paul a problem. And for a reason. Now, I want you to turn with me to 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Let us look at this passage that can really encourage us as we go through life's difficult circumstances.

As children of God when we have problems this gives opportunity for God's power to work in and through our lives and cause us to become stronger.

Hannah's problem caused her to be a better person because it gave opportunity for God's power to work in her life and show her how his power was greater than her problems.

To keep your faith alive, recognize that God is greater than your problems.

2. Request God's help through prayer (vs 9,10)

1 Samuel 1:9-10 *“Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple. ¹⁰ In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD.”* As a result of Hannah's childlessness, we are told that Peninnah

provoked her bitterly and irritated her, year after year. At first this caused Hannah a great deal of distress and sorrow, to the point that "she wept and would not eat" as verse 7 says.

Is this how your problems affect you at times? Hannah could have easily allowed her problems to make her bitter and vindictive, but rather she turned this daily irritation into an opportunity to pray to God.

What do you do when you have problems? Do you complain? Do you throw yourself a pity party? Do you turn into a grouch? Or do you pray?

A little boy was speaking to the pastor of the church and told the preacher that his mother prays for him every night. "Oh, is that right," said the preacher, "what does she say?" "Thank god, he's in bed!" responded the little boy.

We should be aware that the first thing we should do when problems arise is to turn to God instead of turning to our own abilities, or turning to others for advise, or whatever. Nothing wrong about asking for help but if we want real help, let's ask God first and it is God who will guide us and direct us where we can find help.

To keep your faith alive, another thing you can do is to

3. **Resolve to be Committed to God (vs 11-18)**

1 Samuel 1:11-18 *"And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."*

¹² As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³ Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard.

Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴ and said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine."

¹⁵ "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. ¹⁶ Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

¹⁷ Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

¹⁸ She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast."

Something else that makes Hannah an example for us today is the promise that she made to God. In Hannah's prayer she asked God for a son. It is interesting to note that the reason why she asked for a son was not merely so that Peninnah would stop harassing her. Her motive for praying was not selfish, but rather it was God-honoring.

The reason why Hannah wanted a son was because she could give him away to the Lord and so that she could dedicate him to the service of the

Lord. Hannah's prayer did not bring glory to herself, but rather it brought glory to God.

In our day and time, many people find it hard to make a commitment. This started during the generation of baby-boomers. Who are the baby-boomers? Those who were born between the years 1946 and 1964. Many of us here are baby-boomers. So, from the time of the baby-boomers until now many find it hard to make a commitment. They don't want to get tied down. "I want to keep my options open," they say.

Yet, the tragic fear of commitment causes us to miss out on so much. In fact, this fear of commitment causes people to jump from one relationship to another, drift through life without any focus, and live unfulfilled lives.

Why do people fear making commitments? One is because of past hurts. You see, a bad experience can cause us to shy away from responsibilities, from people, even from God. We don't want to get hurt again. Hannah could have become bitter toward God because of her barrenness but she chose to commit herself to God.

Some people can't make a commitment because of self-doubts. We doubt our ability to make the right decision. We are afraid of failing, of not meeting the expectations of others.

Another reason why some people fear making commitments is because of perfectionism. They say things like: "When things settle down, I'll get involved", "One of these days I'll get around to it". But that day never comes. Circumstances can never be perfect. And people are not perfect.

Folks, God is looking for people who will commit themselves to him. As you commit yourself to God, he will honor that commitment. In 1 Samuel 2:30, God says, "Those who honor me I will honor." Don't be afraid of making your commitment to God. He is a fair and faithful God. He is interested in you and your future. In Jeremiah 29:11 he says, "For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'"

Hannah made a commitment. She put away her hurts, doubts, and unrealistic expectations and trusted God with her future. Would you that as well?

To keep your faith alive, recognize that God is greater than your problems. Request God's help through prayer. Resolve to be committed to God.

And lastly,

4. **Remember to Pay Your Vows to God (vs 19-28)**

1 Samuel 1:19-28 ¹⁹*The entire family got up early the next morning and went to worship the LORD once more. Then they returned home to Ramah. When Elkanah slept with Hannah, the LORD remembered her request, ²⁰and in due time she gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, ^[a] for she said, "I asked the LORD for him."*

²¹*The next year Elkanah, Peninnah, and their children went on their annual trip to offer a sacrifice to the LORD. ²²But Hannah did not go. She told her*

husband, "Wait until the baby is weaned. Then I will take him to the Tabernacle and leave him there with the LORD permanently."^[b]

²³"Whatever you think is best," Elkanah agreed. "Stay here for now, and may the LORD help you keep your promise." So she stayed home and nursed the baby.

²⁴When the child was weaned, Hannah took him to the Tabernacle in Shiloh. They brought along a three-year-old bull^[c] for the sacrifice and half a bushel^[d] of flour and some wine. ²⁵After sacrificing the bull, they took the child to Eli. ²⁶"Sir, do you remember me?" Hannah asked. "I am the woman who stood here several years ago praying to the LORD. ²⁷I asked the LORD to give me this child, and he has given me my request. ²⁸Now I am giving him to the LORD, and he will belong to the LORD his whole life." And they^[e] worshiped the LORD there."

Today we hear about people who make certain promises to God, but never keep them. This is worse than not making a commitment. Hannah though was not this kind of person.

She took seriously what Ecclesiastes 5:4,5 says, "So when you make a promise to God, don't delay in following through, for God takes no pleasure in fools. Keep all the promises you make to him. 5It is better to say nothing than to promise something that you don't follow through on."

Hannah prayed diligently for a son, and God answered her prayer. In verse 20 we are told that she named him "Samuel".

The reason why she did this she said was "because I asked him of the Lord". The name "Samuel" in hebrew literally means, "asked of God".

Hannah promised god that if he would give her a son then she would give him back to him. From verses 23, 24 we can see that Hannah gave Samuel up at a very young age. From what is known about the culture of that time Samuel was probably weaned and left home when he was about 5 years old. During those early years Hannah nursed him, cared for him, loved him, taught him, watched him grow and never forgot her vow to god.

When the time came to make her payment she took Samuel to the house of the Lord in shiloh, offered up a sacrificed and gave him to the Lord.

Are you as committed to God as Hannah was? Are you willing to not only consecrate yourself to the Lord but also your children? Is your love for the Lord as strong as Hannah's?

Truly this is what makes Hannah such a great example today. By her actions, we see how Hannah has placed God in the center of her life. She recognized God for who he is, a powerful, helpful, loving, and faithful God. In return, God honored her by giving her what she asked for.

Folks, put God in the center of your life and you'll discover the goodness of God. As you experience his love and faithfulness in your life, the more you'll want to draw close to him. Your faith will become more and more alive when you remember Hannah's example.