



Daring to Dream Again - The Role of Prayer

October 5, 2003

By Rev. David Koch

Introduction:

There were many situations that Jesus found Himself in where He prayed and sought the help, strength, and wisdom of His Heavenly Father.

From the four gospel accounts – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – we find numerous examples of our Lord praying. Here are a few of them.

- We know that he prayed at his baptism.
- He also fasted and prayed during his time in the wilderness.
- Before he chose the 12 disciples, he prayed.
- When people tried to crown him as king, he sought the Father in prayer.
- At his transfiguration, he prayed.
- On the night of his betrayal, in the garden where he was arrested, he prayed.
- As he hung on the cross – naked, bruised, battered and bleeding – he prayed.
- Jesus “often withdrew to a lonely place and prayed.”

When there is no plan “B”; when you’ve exhausted all alternatives; when, if God doesn’t show up, you’re done for. In my case, several times of desperation come to mind:

Money woes – couldn’t pay my tuition.

Job woes – desperately needed a job.

Marital woes – without a miracle the marriage was over.

Transportation woes – we need a vehicle now.

My list could go on and on. How many items could you identify on your “List of Desperation”?

What do we do when our dreams are shattered, when our dreams aren’t fulfilled, when life doesn’t turn out like we had planned? This morning we will follow the story of a woman who desperately wants to have a child, but is unable. In her desperation, she still chooses to “dare to dream.” We’re continuing with our series on “Daring to Dream Again.” Please turn with me to 1 Samuel 1:1–20. I’ll be reading from the New Living Translation.

I Samuel 1:1-20

There was a man named Elkanah who lived in Ramah in the hill country of Ephraim. He was the son of Jeroham and grandson of Elihu, from the family of Tohu and the clan of Zuph. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, while Hannah did not.

Each year Elkanah and his family would travel to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at the Tabernacle. The priests of the LORD at that time were the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas. On the day Elkanah presented his sacrifice, he would give portions of the sacrifice to Peninnah and each of her children. But he gave Hannah a special portion because he loved her very much, even though the LORD had given her no children. But Peninnah made fun of Hannah because the LORD had closed her womb. Year after year it was the same. Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the Tabernacle. Hannah would finally be reduced to tears and would not even eat.

“What’s the matter, Hannah?” Elkanah would ask. “Why aren’t you eating? Why be so sad just because you have no children? You have me. Isn’t that better than having ten sons?”

Once when they were at Shiloh, Hannah went over to the Tabernacle after supper to pray to the LORD. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance. Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the LORD. And she made this vow: “O LORD Almighty, if you will look down 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.”

As she was praying to the LORD, Eli watched her. Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking. “Must you come here drunk?” he demanded. “Throw away your wine!”

“Oh no, sir!” she replied, “I’m not drunk! But I am very sad, and I was pouring out my heart to the LORD. Please don’t think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow.”

“In that case,” Eli said, “cheer up! 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.

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, and in due time she gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, “I asked the LORD for him.”

1. Prayer often arises out of deep need

In our story we learn that Hannah is a desperate woman. Her life hasn’t turned out all like she had planned. Sure, she’s married to a great man who shows her tenderness and love. But she has not produced any children. Her barrenness is sign of terrible disgrace, and her rival wife is taunting her and making her feel like she is a woman with no value. In Hannah’s day, barrenness was considered a curse. Everyone knew of the prophecies concerning a coming messiah and they hoped that perhaps from their lineage the Messiah would be born. If they couldn’t have children then, it was considered to be a curse.

Since Hannah is a God-fearing woman, she decides to take a bold step with her God. Since she has nothing to lose, she makes a covenant with her Lord. Have you ever made a pact with God? “God if you’ll only . . . I will. . . .”

Hannah promises to raise her son as a Nazarite if God will grant her a son. If God grants her prayer, she will give him over to the Lord in full-time ministry service, according to the example of Samson before Samuel, and John the Baptist after him.

Look at verses 10 and 15: Hannah is in “deep anguish, crying bitterly,” in “great anguish and sorrow” – she’s distraught, she’s absolutely miserable, she’s beside herself with grief. Eli, the chief priest, is so taken back by her prayers and bodily movement and expression of emotion that he just assumes she is intoxicated. Frankly, Hannah’s intensity of emotion is causing a scene. Hannah is physically moved by her distress.

Have you ever lost a loved one? When grief is most severe, you can’t hold back the tears, you cry so hard that you are shaking all over. I think Hannah is close to this kind of distress. Have you ever been in such distress that you were visibly shaken, in deep tears?

That is the prayer of one in deep need who brings her disappointment and sorrow to God. If so, you can bring your request directly to God. In just a moment we'll have an opportunity to bring our desperate needs to God. (*special prayer time follows*)

Can you at all relate to Hannah's desperation today? Are you feeling desperate about anything? Are you in deep need? Let's pray in response to God's Word:

Small group prayers, in groups of 3–4. You may want to pray for some church needs – let's pray for God to bring newcomers and seekers to our church services and small groups. Let's pray this morning for the missionaries who are in difficult places and their lives and families are in danger. (Conclude with the Lord's Prayer)

II. Prayer often is a process, rather than an event

Do we think that Hannah just prayed this one time, and her petition was answered? Possibly. Or, since this anguish was an ongoing thing, it may have been that she had uttered prayers about her barrenness on a number of occasions before this incident. Maybe this prayer was recorded to illustrate one of her prayer moments when she was “at wit's end.” Verse 12 in the New International Version reads “As she kept on praying. . . .”

There are times that we pour out our heart to God again and again. There have been months and years that I have prayed for something, pouring out my heart to God, and prayer in those instances is a process not an event.

I can remember praying for children similar to Hannah. Julie and I wanted children, and we sought God to bless us in that way. It was not a one event prayer. We prayed for months, and God answered our prayer.

At times when seeking God for the fulfillment of the dream, prayer is also accompanied by fasting. Fasting is giving up food, or something else that feeds our flesh. Fasting is a time to seek God's face. During times of fasting, there is opportunity to spend more time in God's word.

When the issues are too great, then it seems like God shows us He is able to handle any issue.

During this 50-Day Adventure, we're on a “God Hunt” to try to observe where God is at work. Let's

take time now for a few public prayers to thank God for “showing up.” How have we seen God working? a.k.a. “God Hunt Sightings”: a) an obvious answer to prayer; b) unexpected evidence of God's care; c) unusual linkage or timing; d) help to do God's work in the world.

III. Prayer brings great results

Verse 20 tells us that Hannah's petition was answered in the affirmative. Not only did God fulfill Hannah's “daring dream” but later chapters in I Samuel reveal how Hannah's son Samuel was greatly used by the Lord. The name Samuel means “heard of God.” Hannah's prayer has awesome consequences beyond her wildest dreams. Since the time of the Judges, the entire nation had been “stuck” in an endless cycle. Her son, Samuel, would lead the nation to a point where the nation could “dare to dream again.”

When God answers prayers, acknowledge His work and don't try to explain it or try to stack it up to “positive circumstances.” It's God at work, and that is all we need to know. Hannah named her son Samuel, to indicate that He was a gift from God. Every time Samuel told someone his name, he was afforded the opportunity to give glory to God for His miraculous birth.

When God answers prayer and you have made any special commitments to him, follow through with them. In this case, beginning in verse 24, we are told that Hannah kept her vow to the Lord and after weaning Samuel dedicated him to lifelong service before the Lord.

I think I have shared with this congregation how God answered our prayers for both our children and they are both miracles, gifts from God. When God works, acknowledge Him and not your savvy abilities or special wisdom or circumstances of fortune.

IV. Prayer brings us to commitment and praise

When God answered the prayer of Hannah, she gave back to God what He had blessed her with.

So often when it comes to the fulfillment of a dream, God works in a miraculous way, and we fail to give Him the credit honor and glory that He should be given.

I find it interesting in the 2nd chapter of I Samuel that we have another prayer of Hannah's recorded there. It is the prayer of thanksgiving and gratitude. It is a prophetic prayer. It is a prayer of exaltation and praise for the majestic way He worked.

When God does answer the prayer of desperation, when God does fulfill the dream, don't forget to exalt Him and give Him the praise He deserves.

Conclusion:

Don't just pray out of desperation. That certainly is an important time to pray, but it should not be the only time we seek God. God wants us to know Him, and He wants us to develop an intimate relationship with Him.

It's time for us to imitate Hannah and "Dare to Dream Again." Like Hannah our "Dreams" will be empowered by God through prayer. It is only with God's help that we can "pull off" our dreams.

- Like Hannah, many of our prayers will likely arise out of our deep need.
- Like Hannah, our prayers will likely be a process.
- Like Hannah, great things will happen to us as a result of our prayer.
- Like Hannah, our prayers will bring us to commitment and praise.

Guided Prayer

"Lord and Master, as your servant I sincerely want to please you. I don't need to know your plans for my entire life, so help me focus on today. To the best of my ability to discern, this is what I sense are your expectations: (Please close your eyes and take a few minutes to reflect and listen to anything the Lord might want to reveal to you. If anything comes to mind, make note of it now.) Please empower me to serve you in this way. I want your dreams for me to be my dreams as well. Amen."