

MESSAGE - S.G.K. - Part 1 - Hannah's Prayer

Well, here we go! If you've got a Bible or a Bible app, go ahead and open up to 1 Samuel, chapter 1. We'll be walking through the whole chapter today. I won't be preaching through every verse, but as always, it's helpful to have the text open as we go through it.

So last week we finished a 29-week series in the Sermon on the Mount. And after a long series like that, it's always like... okay, now what?!

So, why 1 & 2 Samuel?

Why choose two Old Testament books that not only span fifty-five chapters, but were written about 3000 years ago, in a world very different from ours?

Well, whenever the church staff and I choose a sermon series, we ask: *What would serve our church family best right now?*

And when I look at these books, I don't just see ancient history. I see stories of real people who wrestled with relevant questions—questions like:

Who am I?

What's my purpose?

Why am I here?

Who can I trust?

Who's really in control?

Will I be forgiven?

And—we'll see this one today:

[SLIDE 1] Will my life matter in God's plan?

But those aren't just *their* questions—they're *ours* too. And that's where the bigger picture comes in.

The stories of Samuel, Saul, and David are part of God's larger story—moments where His faithfulness points us forward to Jesus. And it's in that larger story that we begin to see where our own lives fit.

That's why I'm calling this series: *Seeking God's Kingdom: The Story of Samuel, Saul, David, and Us.*

Because at the end of the day, when we read 1 & 2 Samuel, we should be asking ourselves one question:

[SLIDE 1.1] Whose kingdom am I seeking?

Now, that might sound familiar. If it does—extra brownie points to you! Because this question comes straight out of what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

You might remember the part about worrying? Jesus was saying to the crowd, instead of worrying...

[SLIDE 2] Matthew 6:33 - seek first his kingdom and his righteousness

In other words, we don't have to worry about tomorrow, because God's in control. So instead of worrying, what we need to do is *seek God's Kingdom*—meaning—we seek His will, His righteousness, and His faithfulness.

And you'd think, growing up Jewish, the crowds would've known that already! But God's people have a history of wandering from the narrow road.

And that's exactly where 1 Samuel picks up. At this point in history, God's people didn't just wander off the narrow path... they were caught rubber-necking as they tripped over themselves, rolled down the hill, and landed face-first in a puddle of mud on the wide path.

And, I'm not just saying that to be funny.

After God led His people out of Egypt, what'd they do?

—they worshipped a golden calf.

—they complained about the food and water.

—and time and time again, they tested God's patience.

Then, after they finally entered the Promised Land, what happened?

Did they follow God's Word and live happily ever after? Nope!

They started adopting the practices of other nations. They even worshiped Canaanite gods like Baal and Asherah—which, by the way, were *real*, rebellious powers that pulled people away from God.

They were infecting Israel’s heart like a drug—And, Israel was hooked.

In fact, it was so bad that the book of Judges says over and over:

[SLIDE 3] “The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD” - “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit”¹

It was like a Genesis 6 rerun—where ‘*every inclination of the human heart was only evil all the time.*’² That’s how sick their hearts had become.

And yet—not all was lost! There was still hope!

Because in the middle of all that darkness, a different story was unfolding during the time of Judges. While the nation of Israel was walking away from God, Ruth—a Moabite widow—a *foreigner!*—was walking toward Him.

And because of Ruth’s loyalty to the God of Israel, He used her family to bring about His choice for Israel’s king: David.

But here’s the thing—before David ever comes on the scene, God was already at work raising up a faithful servant who would speak God’s word in a time when almost no one else was listening.

That servant was Samuel. But Samuel’s story doesn’t begin with him—it begins with the anguish and the prayer of his mother, **Hannah**.

So here’s where we need to pause and remember where we are in God’s larger story...

When we open 1 Samuel chapter 1, we’re not just picking up some random story about a barren woman praying for a son. We’re seeing God’s plan in action.

[SLIDE 4] While the nation of Israel was busy being unfaithful, God was at work through the loyalty of Ruth and the faithful cries of Hannah.

¹ Judges 2:11, 3:7, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, 13:1, 17:6, 21:25

² Genesis 6:5

But isn't that a picture of what faith often looks like?

Sometimes faith looks like quietly clinging to Jesus in steadfast loyalty. Other times, it means crying out to Him in desperation.

Like a pendulum, we swing back and forth between the two. One day we're standing steady and faithful. And the next, we're completely undone by life's unexpected trials.

That back-and-forth may feel out of our control, but no matter where we are on the pendulum, the Lord is near.

And so, when we meet Hannah in the first chapter of Samuel, we find her in a moment of deep anguish, crying out in desperation.

[SLIDE 5] Hannah's Anguish — 1 Samuel 1:1-8

In the first few verses, we learn that Hannah's married to Elkanah, an Israelite man from Ephraim.

And at this point in Israel's history, their place of worship wasn't a building—it was actually a big, fancy, portable tent—called a tabernacle (aka: the House of the LORD). The tabernacle had been set up in a town called Shiloh for the past 350+ years. Israelite families from all over were supposed to travel there to worship and make sacrifices to the LORD.

But in the time of the Judges, it's safe to say that most families in Israel had abandoned God's ways. Pilgrimages to Shiloh weren't the norm—and yet, year after year, Elkanah made sure his family made the almost 20 mile journey.

It's like the writer's telling us: *Here's a family that's unusually faithful in a time of widespread unfaithfulness.*

But I guess even the most faithful families have their struggles...

If you noticed, Elkanah had *two* wives—Hannah and Peninnah. Now, let's set the record straight: *polygamy was never God's design.*

God's pattern for marriage has always been one man and one woman. It's true that the Old Testament sometimes shows men with multiple wives—but it's *never* something God approves.

Some bible scholars suggest that maybe Elkanah married Peninnah *because* Hannah couldn't have children. In their culture, keeping the family line going was everything. But whatever the reason, it created a rivalry that cut Hannah to the core.

So, picture this: A small group of families gathered at the House of the LORD in Shiloh to worship and feast together in honor of the LORD.

The camera pans over to Elkanah's table and we see Peninnah with her children on one side, Hannah on the other, and Elkanah at the head of the table.

Every year, the tension between Hannah and Peninnah grew—because while Peninnah gave Elkanah children, his heart was really with Hannah. And he wasn't discreet about it! The text says he gave her a double portion of food...

Well that only increased her grief, because she had no children to share it with. And instead of showing Hannah some compassion, Peninnah chose to verbally humiliate her in public.

And Elkanah? He just let it happen. Rather than defend Hannah, he chose to make it about himself. He said: "*Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? **Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?***"

His love for Hannah was real, but his words showed that he didn't understand her pain. Because in their culture, a wife's honor was tied to bearing children. Hannah couldn't—and even though it wasn't her fault, it still felt like failure..

—Peninnah made sure of that.

And so, unable to eat and overcome with despair—
Hannah wept bitterly.

And maybe you resonate with that? Maybe you know what it feels like to be cut down by someone else's words... or to carry a burden that no one else seems to understand. That's where Hannah was.

It's a good reminder that even people who seem faithful on the outside can be breaking on the inside.

But remember what Jesus said?

[SLIDE 6] Matthew 5:4 - Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

As we're about to see, even in Hannah's pain, God was near.

So, starting in verse 9, when everyone was done with the meal, Hannah stood up and left the table...

[SLIDE 7] Hannah's Prayer — 1 Samuel 1:9-18

She found a place by herself—somewhere by the entrance of the “Temple Tent”—because the High Priest could see her from where he was sitting.

And as he watched her pray, he couldn't hear her, but we get a glimpse into her tear filled prayer...

[SLIDE 8] 1 Samuel 1:11 - And she made a vow, saying, “LORD Almighty, if you will only look on 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.”

Now, I have to admit, at first glance, this seems like a transactional kind of prayer. Like, “*Lord, if You do this for me, then I will do that for You.*”

But Hannah's not asking for a child to erase her shame, or even just to be happy. **Her prayer follows the ancient Nazirite vow from Numbers 6** — it was a legitimate way to express devotion to God. So, this wasn't her bargaining with God—her prayer was an act of faith.

Remember, she sees herself as a servant of the LORD above all else. That's why the love of Elkanah wasn't enough—she wanted to be part of God's story.

But in her culture, a woman who couldn't bear children—especially a son—was often treated as useless. She didn't want to be useless in the Kingdom of God.

**But here's where God was already near:
The scripture is careful to say—*twice!*...**

[SLIDE 9] “the LORD had closed her womb.” (1 Samuel 1:5-6)

That's not God being mean. It was part of His plan all along.

Because if Hannah had children in the way Peninnah did, then she might never have reached the point of full surrender. So God chose to bring her into part of His larger story, by closing her womb. And out of her barrenness, God doesn't just give her *any* child—He gives her **Samuel—the prophet that would anoint Israel's first kings and shape the destiny of the nation!**

So...

[SLIDE 10] Hannah's vow wasn't about erasing shame—it was about participating in God's story.

And in her grief, she discovered the nearness of God.
That's the blessing in the mourning—it's the comfort in the pain.

And isn't this exactly what Jesus meant when He said, ‘*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted*’? Hannah's comfort came before Samuel was even born! ...Because God Himself drew near.

Isn't that how God often works? Things happen to us and they don't always seem clear until we're able to look at them in hindsight. But Hannah's story is a helpful reminder that even when we don't realize it, God is near.

Now, looking at Hannah from a distance, Eli (the High Priest) wasn't sure what in the world she was doing. So she explained that she was pouring out her soul to the LORD—She was *lamenting* out of her deep anguish and grief.

But after she finished praying, her pendulum was already swinging back from desperation to steadfast loyalty. Because the LORD was already starting to comfort her.

I mean, think about it... her life circumstances hadn't changed—but *everything* changed in her heart. In fact, verse 18 says she went away, ate something, and *her face was no longer downcast*.

**That's what the comfort of God looks like in real life—
That's also what Seeking God's Kingdom looks like.**

So here's a question:

[SLIDE 11] How will we pray in our moments of deep pain?

So often our instinct is to pray like we're bargaining: "*Lord, if You do this for me, then I'll do that for You.*" But that posture can make us miss what God's already doing.

Hannah's prayer shows us a different way. It wasn't bargaining—it was surrender. It was saying, "*Lord, my life belongs to Your story.*"

And isn't that exactly why Jesus taught us to pray: "*Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*"?

Because the goal of prayer isn't just to get what we want—it's to want what God wants. That's what it means to faithfully **seek His Kingdom**. And when we do, we begin to see how our story fits into His.

**So what happened with Hannah's story?
Well, the LORD answered her prayer...**

[SLIDE 12] God's Faithfulness - 1 Samuel 1:19-28

Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son—Samuel. His Hebrew name sounds like the Hebrew for "*heard by God.*" She named him that because she asked the LORD, and He heard her prayer.

The text says Samuel stayed with her until “after he was weaned.” In their culture, that meant Samuel was maybe 3 years old when Hannah brought him to Eli at the House of the LORD.

And when they arrived, Hannah said to Eli...

[SLIDE 13] 1 Samuel 1:26-28 - “Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD.”

Hannah just gave her only son to the LORD. That’s really hard to imagine—I don’t know that I could do it. It would feel like I’m abandoning my child on the tabernacle doorstep.

But Hannah wasn’t *abandoning* Samuel—she was *entrusting* him into God’s hands. She made a vow, and the Lord honored her faithfulness. She poured out her soul in prayer, and God poured out His favor.

Still, we might not be able to fully relate to that—but God can.

In fact, Hannah gave *Samuel*—his name meaning, ‘God hears us.’ God gave *Immanuel*—whose name means, ‘God with us.’

So, it’s safe to say that **the God who hears is the God who comes near**. He knows what it’s like to give His only Son, so that ultimately, His will would be accomplished. But for God’s will to be done, that often means we need to surrender our own will.

And surrender is never easy. It often means laying something down we’d rather hold onto. For Hannah, it was surrendering a number of things...

- She could’ve fought back against Peninnah’s attacks.
- She could’ve begged God for a child just to restore her reputation.
- She could’ve turned her back on God, blaming Him for closing her womb.

But she didn’t do any of that.

Despite her deep anguish, she remained faithful—to the point where she was moved to make a sacred and selfless vow to the LORD.

And so, all of this reminds me of Paul's encouragement in Philippians chapter 4. He said...

[SLIDE 14] Philippians 4:4-7 - Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Notice that what Hannah experienced is the same truth that Paul calls us into!

Her story is living proof of what it looks like to “rejoice in the Lord always” and experience His peace in the middle of anguish.

No wonder why Paul repeated himself! It's almost like he's saying, *Look, I know how this sounds, but it's true! In fact, it's not just true, it's possible!*

And—just being transparent with you—In my 42+ years on this earth, I've never had more moments in one year where I've asked the Lord: *How am I supposed to rejoice in this?*

And yet, despite all the feelings of anxiety and helplessness—the Lord proved He was near the whole time—and He still is.

And so, for me, this passage—especially verse 7— has become my anchor in the storm.

In fact, let's read verse 7 together (highlighted):

And the peace of God... which transcends ALL understanding... will GUARD your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

There's unlimited power in that truth—
Because it's grounded in the matchless Name of Jesus.

And so—moments of anguish and anxiety will happen. It might be sudden—or maybe, like Hannah, it's something that's been building over time.

Her story and Paul's teaching both encourage us to first and foremost:

Remember that the Lord is near. And second, **pray.**

Pour out your heart to God—it's okay to lament and ask God our “why” questions.

But we don't have to drown in our worry—
Because the surrendered heart will feel His peace standing guard.
That's the kind of heart that seeks God's kingdom.
It's the heart that surrenders our story for His larger story.

So the question for us remains: *Whose kingdom am I seeking?*

Let's Pray

The Lord's Prayer — *Let's pray together as the Lord taught us to pray...*

[PRAYER 1] Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

[PRAYER 2] Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

[PRAYER 3] And lead us not into testing, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.