

November 15, 2015

According to the Pages of Hannah

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1 Samuel 2:1-10

Hannah's Prayer

2 Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in my God. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory. "There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one 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. ⁴ The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. ⁵ Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil. The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn. ⁶ The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. ⁷ The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also 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. ⁹ "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail. ¹⁰ The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered; the Most High will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed."

This passage comes up every three years. I chose it weeks ago, well before someone in our own life together gave up what was to be her baby -- like Hannah of the Bible.

Hannah -- who thought she'd never have a child, and then she did. And then she was his mama from far away the whole rest of her life.

I Samuel chapters 1 and 2 aren't about Samuel, except in what his birth taught Hannah and what she in turn can teach others -- about believing in God, about trusting God, when we are ready, however long it takes to be ready.

Chapter 1 describes Hannah's sadness, and verse 7 says, *it went on year after year.*

However. Long. (it takes to be ready)

I cut my finger three weeks ago. The stitches are out but it's still too swollen to wear my wedding rings. I sprained my ankle two years ago and it's still not right. I shattered my wrist 18 years ago and it was 10 years before it didn't ache in the winter. Bodies heal faster than spirits. So much faster. Bodies heal pretty much automatically. Spirits only ever heal by intention.

What I appreciate about Hannah and about the Bible's treatment of Hannah is that she doesn't pretend she's okay when she isn't. She doesn't sing about how awesome God has been to her until after God has been really awesome to her.

Before God comes through for her, Hannah is faithful. She is restrained. She is worshipful. She is prayerful. She is graceful.

But her big song of public praise of God comes AFTER God proves God's self faithful to her.

I eat lunch at the Kroger Café sometimes. It's cheap, healthy and fast. Recently it was super crowded, and I ended up sharing a table

with a man who ended up sharing his religious history with me. His mom was a Pentecostal street preacher missionary in Miami. She sent him to a private junior high and high school run by fundamentalist Southern Baptists, where the Cuban kids terrorized the black kids mercilessly while adults taught the Bible and ignored the abuse. My lunch mate is a black man and an IU professor.

He talked his mom into letting him go to public school his senior year so he could take AP classes and get into college. *“Plus, it was safer,”* he said, *“Miami public schools. Go figure.”*

“Wow,” I said.

“Anyway,” he said, *“I’m done with church . . . had enough organized Christianity to last my lifetime and then some.”* But here’s what I know: the person across the table from me *looks* like a 40-year-old professor, but it’s not the professor talking.

You think he tells this story to his faculty colleagues? Noooooo

He tells it to the Baptist. Woman. Preacher. -- with whom he ends up eating a one-time meal at the Kroger Café.

Am I going to tell him he ought to praise God no matter what? I’ve known preachers who would. I’m related to people who would (mostly by marriage, honestly).

From this 40-year-old man's body is coming the wounded voice of a 17-year-old kid who still feels the abuse that religion allowed and still hears the nonsense it taught.

The only thing I have to say to him is, *"It makes me so sad that happened to you. I'd totally understand if you never want to try again. But if you do, I'd love my church to be the one you gave the chance."*

Hats off to believers able to praise God in every circumstance no matter what. More power to them. The best of them - the most authentic - are usually the ones who've been in the game a long time, who've been through many trials and have the history from which to turn and see how God was working in a situation even when they didn't know it at the time.

Just don't pretend it wasn't scary or sad. And don't suggest that every Bible page teaches it. Because the pages of Hannah don't. She wanted a baby -- for years and years, while the other wife had baby after baby and made fun of Hannah when she prayed for her own. Her husband was extra kind to Hannah -- which was good, but didn't make up for a baby.

Life went on like this for years and years and years. Hannah finally got pregnant and had baby Samuel. Her song about it sounds like she'd been through a war:

My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in my victory. ⁴ The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. . . ^[9] but the wicked

shall be cut off in darkness; for not by might does one prevail. ¹⁰ The LORD! His adversaries shall be shattered;

To her it was a war -- in which she fought grief and sadness. She fought abuse in her own home; she fought the doubt that God was listening; she fought the exhaustion of endless waiting; she fought the temptation to give up; she fought the desire to die rather than live in such pain.

Her weapons: the armor of her faith, if we are going to stick with this metaphor; restraint (no killing Peninnah in sleep, which surely crossed her mind); prayer; worship; weeping - how humans flush out the toxins of grief and sadness; and grace -- not only giving but receiving grace, letting the ones who loved her carry her (Hannah's darling husband, who longed to be more to her than ten sons).

Call them weapons if you want. According to the pages of Hannah, they are as faithful as praise.

Friends, life is long.

Faith is slow.

And God is patient.

We are allowed to grieve, to doubt, and to tend our hearts. Let us be tender to one another . . . and do our best . . . day by day . . . to trust God's promises to keep us well and keep us loved.

Would you pray with me?