

Here she was walking again and it was only her and her husband. For years they had been coming and for years she had suffered ridicule because she didn't have a child. She was young and married. It should have happened by now. But each year the pain grew worse because each year she got one year closer to not being able to have children at all. She knew that at a certain point the human body just doesn't support having children anymore. She hoped that wouldn't happen to her.

It wasn't because she hadn't prayed to God. Her knees hurt because of all the praying. We wouldn't blame her if we found out she wondered if God was busy with something else. How could he keep this from her? Her prayers consistently begged for a child. One time she prayed and she vowed that if God would give her a child she would give that child back to the Lord for service. It was one of those desperate moments where you make any kind of deal in order to get what you want.

As low as she felt for years not having a son, you can imagine her joy when she found out she was pregnant. **"The Lord remembered her. So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son."** The pain of childbirth, the screams of a newborn, the long sleepless nights; none of it mattered because she waited so long. Complaining wasn't an option because the Lord had answered her prayer. She named her son Samuel, which means 'I asked for him'.

Nothing could diminish her joy. She smothered him with love and attention. How could she take her eyes off of him? He was precious because he was hers. Every moment was important to savor. As great as this family was it was limited. Why? Remember that one prayer because Hannah did. It was that one time when she promised the Lord if he would give her a child she would dedicate the child to the Lord. It was like a hundred prayers and thoughts that you've had. Just give me this one thing Lord and I'll do this for you. He would never hold her to it, would he? This was her only son. She waited so long for him. How could she give him up?

For Hannah it was never a question. **"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."** Samuel was probably only a toddler. Her time with him was short. But never did she waver in her decision. In fact in the prayer she speaks immediately after leaving Samuel with the priest she doesn't curse God asking why this had to happen. She doesn't scream out in terror at the thought of not seeing her child. We would have understood those reactions, the irony of it all. She begs for a child and when she makes the vow to give him back to the Lord, that's when the Lord gives the child to her. But instead her reaction is joyful. **"My heart rejoices in the Lord."** Hannah rejoices because the Lord answered her prayer. The Lord encouraged her throughout those long years without a child. The Lord's promises to Hannah never failed.

Hannah and her husband continued to make the yearly trip to the festival of the Lord. They would come to the city and worship God with their fellow Israelites. Along with all the other sacrifices and gifts they brought before the Lord they carried something else. It was a gift for that young boy who served next to the priest. He was young but he was serving his God. He learned from early on that his life was one of service to the Lord. He learned of the promise his mother made because it was the reason why he didn't live with his parents. It wouldn't surprise us if he got down or sad. Or if he needed encouragement because of his situation. He was away from mom and dad and probably missed them.

His encouragement came new each year. It was the robe he wore; it was made by his mom. **"Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice."** That robe was the encouragement Hannah gave her son Samuel. When they both looked at it they could both remember the promise God made to Hannah to answer prayer. They would remember the promise Hannah made to God to give her son into the Lord's service. Hannah showed her faith by making that robe each year, a faith that loved to praise God for the wonderful blessing he gave her. That was her encouragement for Samuel.

We might not have the blessings from God we think we should. Perhaps it's children that we don't yet have but want. Maybe it's that job we've always wanted but just don't seem to get. Maybe it's a team that we wish we could be on but haven't made. We can go continually to the Lord in prayer asking for these blessings. We'd be following in the footsteps of Hannah. We can even go to him and vow to use whatever he gives for service in his kingdom and to his glory. What we can't do is think God has made a mistake. If we don't have children, the job, or the team we wish we had it isn't because God's made a mistake. He gives to each just what blessings and talents he wants them to have. That's God's gift of encouragement to us. He promises you have just what he wants you to have.

Instead of focusing on what we don't have let's focus on what we do have from God. Realize God may answer yes or he may answer no to your prayers. He may even ask you to wait longer. But we can be encouraged by the promises we know are true from God's Word. A Savior in Jesus that forgives all our sins. Talents and blessings to use to his glory. Whatever we do receive from God is a gift of his grace. It's encouragement he still loves and cares for us and is leading us home. Be encouraged by God's blessings to you. Follow in the footsteps of Hannah there too.

Some people are given the gift of encouragement. They're people most like Hannah. She encouraged her son in his vocation even though it meant she wouldn't see him for much of his life. Because she trusted in the Lord, Hannah was willing to see her son once a year and spend the time with him she could. She trusted in the Lord that this was part of his plan for her life. You might encourage your children in the same way. Consider encouraging your children to think about ministry as a career option. Being a pastor or teacher are not the only ways to serve the Lord. But they are great ways.

Parents, you have a great responsibility to encourage. You're given the task by God to encourage your children to know the Lord by faith. They are God's gifts to protect, watch over, and train to know Jesus. Anything else you encourage them to have is useless without Christ. We stand as a church ready to help you with this task. Know that wherever your child chooses to work they can and will be serving their Lord. Encourage them to serve the Lord where they are.

Do you need encouragement? We all do at one point in time or another. We might be down because of something we don't have that we want. We might be experiencing difficult times that force us to struggle. God might not be giving us the reasons why at all. We do know that he loves us. We know that as we struggle our God is working to grant us blessings and bring us to eternal life. He lifts our spirits by encouragement that comes from the Word, that comes through the gospel, and in many cases comes from others.