

Faith Under Fire Study 2: *Passionate Pleas*

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The Story

Aaron threw himself into Hannah's arms, and she bounced him up onto her hip. The boy had the innocent face of a chubby little angel. It was a picture-perfect moment. And yet, it was not. Hannah's joy was overcome with a quick glance from across the room. Peninnah's eyes burned a hole into Hannah. "You have my husband. Would you steal my children too?"

Hannah longed for a child. She needed to pass on her family's name, her husband's name and her faith to a new generation. When her husband, Elkanah, realized Hannah could not have children, he also married Peninnah. That was how it worked back then. A woman without children was considered cursed, but a man even more. And so, traditionally, a man would marry another woman to have children for him. It is true that some traditions are better forgotten. Elkanah favored Hannah, but that did not help her loneliness. To make matters worse, this was the most painful time of the year for Hannah.

Hannah set Aaron down. Unaware of the intensity of the adults around him, Aaron ran to kiss his mother before bounding out the door to his father. Peninnah's eyes traced his steps out the front door. She glanced back at Hannah, and then turned away to follow her son. With just that little look, Hannah came undone. Going to Shiloh, to visit the Tabernacle of God each year had given her such wonderful memories as a child. Now, she dreaded it.

The Tabernacle was this grand, ancient tent. It was beautifully crafted and ornate. Hannah's grandmother had told her that this tent was made by Moses, in the wilderness. God traveled with His people in this tent. The people had seen fire at night and a cloud by day, over that tent. Even today, now in the Promised Land, God remained with His people. Every year, families from all over would come to visit and to worship their God through sacrifice.

She remembered following her father to the tabernacle entrance as a little girl, and then clinging to her mother's leg as her father went in to make the sacrifice. The smoke would flare up past the deep blue sides of the courtyard curtains. First a little white smoke and then a flash of fire and a pillar of gray smoke followed. Every year this amazed Hannah and it brought her comfort. It meant all was forgiven. It meant that her father was faithful. It meant safety and peace.

As an adult, each time Hannah went she hoped, that year, some small child of her own would be clinging to her leg. Each year that did not happen, her heart broke a little more. Making matters worse, Peninnah became especially brutal this time of year. Her words, spoken and unspoken, burned into Hannah's soul. Each and every year, at some point in this supposedly joyful time, Hannah would find herself weeping in her tent, unable to control the pain. Today, she decided to do something different.

Holding back tears, Hannah slipped out the back of their tent and made her way to the Tabernacle. It was quiet. It had been so full of life earlier, but that same sacred feeling she always had here did not go away. She still felt His presence. Smoke continued to rise from the courtyard, and she touched the blue curtain that surrounded the tabernacle, keeping her from going further in. She could not keep her composure anymore and her body began to crumple. Her tears became sobs and those sobs became gasps and soon Hannah was wailing. "God, I can't go on." Her mouth moved but no words came out. She continued one of the most heartfelt prayers of her life, with only her lips moving. Suddenly, Hannah felt a hand firmly grasp her left shoulder.

She turned around to see an old priest. He had been watching from the temple entrance. "Put away your wine, woman," he growled with a worn voice. Continuing to shake, Hannah said, "I am not drunk, but my spirit is crushed. I have brought my request to God." The priest's grip loosened and his brow softened. In a gravelly but now compassionate tone, the priest said five words to Hannah that she would cling to for months to come. "May God grant your request."

The Scripture

1 Samuel 1:13-18

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 are you going to stay drunk? Put away 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.

The Serenity Prayer

Read the Serenity Prayer and think about it.

"Lord, grant me...
the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things that I can, and
the wisdom to know the difference."

Many a person in recovery has had these words upon their lips. The truth is that recovery is needed by everyone. You who "once were lost" and "now are found," you cannot keep living the same way! Some things will need to change. Some things cannot change, and we pray to God for the serenity to accept those things, but never forget that some things need to change.

Change Something

Year after year, Hannah endured the same thing at each pilgrimage to the Tabernacle at Shiloh. Year after year she was reminded that she was without children, and year after year she was taunted by the same woman. Year after dreary year, she would run to her tent to cry until it was time to leave. And then... one year, she ran to a different tent. Rather than returning to her place of safety, she went on a leap of faith and as a lone woman, she walked to the tent she was not allowed in. She stood there and she prayed. That year, she approached her problem differently. That year was to change her life and the course of a nation as God would allow Hannah to carry Samuel, who would one day be a great prophet and judge in Israel.

Last month, we looked at the story of Abraham and we asked ourselves what our “first step” may be, as we start the journey of faith. This week, let’s think about what we need to change. For you to continue your journey of faith, something needs to change.

What will that change be?

Something Needs to Change

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. 1 Samuel 1:17-18