THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR FAITH

From Priest to King
A Study of 1 and 2 Samuel
Edward Robinson

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Dr. Edward Robinson is currently the pulpit minister for the West End church of Christ in Terrell, Texas, and serves on the faculty at Southwestern Christian College. He has served churches of Christ in Mississippi, Illinois, and Texas and has also taught on the faculty at Abilene Christian University. Brother Robinson has studied at Southwestern Christian College, Harding School of Theology, and Mississippi State University. He and his wife, Toni, have been married 30 years and have three daughters.
Godly women have had a profound impact on the history of Christianity. Concerned women materially and financially supported Jesus during His public ministry (Luke 8:1-3). Christians in Joppa wept when Tabitha (Dorcas) died because they were touched by her legacy of love and good works (Acts 9:36-42). Lydia showed hospitality to Paul and Silas (Acts 16:15, 40). Timothy’s grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, molded his character (2 Timothy 1:5). St. Augustine’s mother, Monica, fervently prayed for him when he was struggling to find his way to God. St. Augustine, a church leader from North Africa, wrote that “how much greater was the anxiety she suffered for my spiritual birth than the physical pain she had endured in bringing me into the world” (Confessions, pg. 102). God answered Monica’s prayers, and St. Augustine went on to become one of the most influential theologians in the early church. When Mama prays, something happens!

Samuel Robert Cassius (1853-1931), an enslaved African from Virginia, emerged as a significant black leader in Churches of Christ and preached the “pure gospel” for almost four decades. At the age of 72, Cassius affirmed, “I am that I am because of my mother, and for her sake I have tried to make good.” God heard the prayers of Cassius’s mother, Jane, who molded and shaped his character. When Mama prays, something happens!
Hannah’s Problem

Elkanah, an Ephramite, had two wives, Penninah and Hannah. Penninah was blessed to have children, while Hannah was barren (1 Samuel 1:2). In ancient times, it was considered a disgrace for women who could not have children. The psalmist explained, “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior so are sons born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate” (Psalm 127:3-5). Job was deemed a blessed and prosperous man not only because of his livestock and possessions, but also because of his seven sons and three daughters (Job 1:2). Anguish, however, consumed Hannah’s life because of her inability to have children. Her anguish grew into anger as Penninah “provoked her till she wept and would not eat” (1 Samuel 1:7).

Instead of retaliating against her adversary who provoked her, Hannah chose to go to God in prayer. “In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord. And she made a vow, saying, ‘O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon 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’” (1 Samuel 1:10-11).

Hannah’s Prayer

We have three choices in how we can deal with anger. First, we can choose to “internalize” it. That is, we can harbor it or hold it inside our heart. When we do so, we can damage our physical health. Dr. Murray Mittleman, an internist and epidemiologist at Harvard Medical School, has found that “getting angry can be deadly for people suffering
from heart disease. That’s because people with heart disease more than double their risk of a heart attack when they get angry.” Other studies have shown that “anger increases the heart rate, boosts high blood pressure and encourages the clogging of arteries” (“Anger Can Trigger Heart Attacks, Study Shows” *Jet Magazine*, April 11, 1994). Someone has noted that “ANGER” is one letter away from “DANGER.”

Second, we can choose to “externalize” our anger. This means that we can resort to destroying property and attacking people. Anger inspired Cain to kill his own brother, Abel (Genesis 4:5). Rage so consumed King Saul that he attempted to inflict physical harm on David, an innocent man (1 Samuel 18:8-11).

Third, we can choose to “actualize” our anger. That is, we can choose to release it to God. We can choose to vent our rage to our heavenly Father (Hebrews 4:16). This is what the psalmist did in Psalm 137. Hannah did this as well in 1 Samuel 1:10-11, taking her problem to the God of heaven and placing it at His feet and in His hands. This is what we must learn to do.

For the sake of clarity, not all anger is bad or evil. There is a healthy type of anger. Jesus became angry (Mark 3:5). We must work to control our anger (Ephesians 4:26-27; James 1:19-20). Child abuse, broken homes and marriages, and split churches ought to make us angry enough to make things right.

**Hannah’s Prayer Was a Sincere Prayer**

When Eli, the priest, observed Hannah talking to herself, he presumed that she was drunk so he told her: “Get rid of your wine” (1 Samuel 1:13). Hannah denied the accusation: “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. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief” (1 Samuel
Hannah told her heavenly Father exactly how she felt, exactly what she was going through, unloading on Him all her troubles and struggles.

Whenever we talk to God, we need to “pour out” our hearts and souls to Him. That is, we need to tell Him exactly how we feel and exactly what we’re going through. In other words, say what you mean and mean what you say. Scripture encourages us to do this. The psalmist encouraged, “Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (Psalm 62:8). We can not pour out hearts to humans, or even some church members for that matter, but we can unload all our stuff on the God who cares (1 Peter 5:7).

Hannah’s prayer was neither long (1 Samuel 1:11) nor loud (1 Samuel 12-14). Some of the best prayers are short and sincere. Before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:38). While He was hanging on the cross, He petitioned, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34) and then “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). The tax-collector prayed, “God, be merciful to me the sinner” (Luke 18:13). Stephen, while soaked in blood, prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59).

**Hannah’s Prayer Was a Specific and Selfless Prayer**

In addition to offering a sincere prayer, Hannah’s prayer was also specific. She prayed specifically for a little boy (1 Samuel 1:11). Why did Hannah pray for a little boy? The Book of Judges closes with a sad assessment: “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit” (Judges 21:25). Because there was no leadership in Israel, idolatry and immorality ran rampant. Hannah prayed for a son because she hoped that God would raise up a man of God to fill a major void in the nation of Israel.
Hannah’s prayer is relevant today for two reasons. First, we too have a dire need for leadership in our homes and churches. Because of the absence of strong and godly black men in our homes and churches, the African American community is engulfed with serious problems. In “Madea’s Family Reunion,” Myrtle (Cicely Tyson), the family’s matriarch, spoke passionately to her young audience: “Young black men, take your place! We need you. Your sons and daughters need you…Take your place! Starting now! Starting now! Starting now!” We need our black men to return to God and take their rightful place in the church as preachers, elders, and deacons and in the home as husbands and fathers.

Second, Hannah’s prayer is significant because it was selfless. She wanted the boy not just for herself, but also for her people, Israel. In this regard, Hannah’s prayer was not only sincere, but it was also selfless. When we pray, we need to learn to think about others (James 4:3). We should seek and request gifts that will bless and benefit, not just ourselves, but others, as Solomon did when He asked God for wisdom. Solomon wanted an understanding heart so that he could lead and guide God’s people effectively (1 Kings 3:9).

**Hannah’s Prayer Was a Surrendered Prayer**

Hannah made a vow to God. She promised that if God gave her a son, she would, in turn, dedicate him back to God. Hannah vowed to submit and surrender her child to God. In antiquity, vows were both sacred and serious. It was best not to make a vow if you knew you had no intentions of fulfilling it (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5).

Whenever God blesses us with something, we ought to show our gratitude by giving it back to Him. If the Lord gives us children, we ought to give them back to Him by training them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). When the Lord blesses us with better employment, we ought to give the job back to Him by giving
of our earnings (Proverbs 3:9-10; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7). When the Lord blesses us with a bigger and better house, we ought to give it back to Him by opening it up for prayer service and Bible study. When the Lord gives us a bigger and better vehicle, we ought to dedicate it to the Lord by getting to worship service on time, by transporting sick people to the doctor’s office, and by bringing needy people to the Lord’s house. When the Lord imparts wisdom into our hearts, we need to give it back to Him by counseling people in need of moral and spiritual guidance.

Thankfully, Hannah kept her vow to God. She named her son, Samuel, which meant “heard of God” or “answered prayer” (1 Samuel 1:20). Hannah further said, “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. And he worshiped the Lord there” (1 Samuel 1:27-28). Indeed, the Lord gave Hannah more than one child; He actually gave her at least five more (1 Samuel 2:21). Sometimes the Lord will not only give us what we ask, but He will also grant us that and much more (Ephesians 3:20-21). Can you say Amen?

**Discussion Questions**

1. How can we give our blessings back to God?
2. Why did Hannah pray for a son?
3. Do you believe we need more leadership in our homes and churches today? If so, please explain.
4. What are the three options in dealing with anger?
5. How can anger hurt us?
6. How can anger be a positive force?
7. How did Hannah deal with her anger and anguish?
8. In Hannah’s day, children were considered blessings. Do you think that is true today?
9. What did Samuel’s name mean?
10. Share with the class a time when God specifically heard and answered your prayer.