

In the Process of Time

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So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, **"Because I have asked for him from the Lord."** (I Samuel 1:20)

Hannah had a desire and a prayer of her heart answered by God in such a way that it could be written about her circumstance, **"So it came to pass..."**. Do you have a desire, a dream, a prayer that you have been lifting up to the Lord about which you long to be able to give the report, **"So it came to pass..."**?

The story of Hannah gives us some vital clues about the process of time between the asking and the receiving. First of all we must recognize that there is a process of time involved, sometimes short, and sometimes longer. It is also important to understand that the process of time can be extended or shortened depending upon our response to the process. The word "process" is defined as "a continuing development involving many changes" according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary. Another definition is simply, "something going on". Oftentimes when we are in the middle of the process of time in our own particular circumstance, it seems more like "nothing's going on." Yet we can be encouraged by this passage of scripture, that when you are in the process...**something's going on!**

Let's take a close look at the progression of Hannah's story. Hannah's name means "grace" or "favor". Her husband Elkanah's name means "possession of God". Hannah was dearly loved by Elkanah as demonstrated by the fact that when it came time to divide the portion of meat from the yearly sacrifice to the Lord, Elkanah gave Hannah a "double portion" according to I Samuel 1:5. He did not love her based on her performance as a wife, because she had borne him no children. In that cultural setting, a woman's value was often based on their ability to produce children, especially male heirs.

Elkanah just loved Hannah for herself. This is a picture of God's love for you. It is NEVER dependent upon your performance, it is simply based on God's unconditional heart of love. Many people struggle with this concept and are bound up in religious traditions that say God only loves you when you act right, or when you perform certain religious works. **But God**

demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8) Like Elkanah's love for Hannah, God loves you just for you...completely apart from any performance on your part. It is not based on how good you are, it is based on how good HE is. **God is love.** (I John 4:8)

The second observation that we can make in Hannah's story is the torment she endured from her "rival".

And her rival also provoked her severely to make her miserable, because she was barren. (I Sam. 1:6)

Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. The name Peninnah means "coral". Scuba divers know how painful and dangerous a coral cut can be because it becomes easily infected. The verbal "cuts" that Hannah received from Peninnah were painful. They were constant reminders of her own lack of children, since Peninnah had borne several children to Elkanah.

In your particular situation as you walk through the "process of time" you will encounter your rival (Satan - the enemy of your soul) attempting to provoke you severely to make you miserable by reminding you of your lack of an answer to prayer. Do not allow the taunts of the enemy to destroy your faith in God about your answer being on the way. When it looks like nothing is happening, remember, process means "something's going on". (it just may not be apparent to the naked eye!)

Because of this continual torment from her rival and no outward sign of any change in her circumstances, Hannah found herself in a dangerous place.

And she was in bitterness of soul... (I Samuel 1:10)

The Hebrew word which is translated "bitterness" in this passage means "angry, heavy or discontented". Every person struggling to believe God for a breakthrough will face the temptation to become bitter (angry, heavyhearted or discontent) at God for the seeming lack of a timely answer. This is a dangerous place! People at this point either draw close to God and pour out their heart of anguish to Him OR they turn and walk away from Him, believing Him to be unkind. Hannah chose the former.

And she was in bitterness of soul, and she prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish. (v.10)

Then she made a very wise decision. She consecrated to God the very thing that she was asking from the Lord. Verse 11 tells us: **...she made a vow**

and said, "Oh Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your maidservant and remember me, and not forget your maidservant, but will give your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.

Hannah was willing to surrender to God the desire of her heart. Are you in the "process of time" awaiting the answer to your prayer? Are you willing to honestly consecrate it completely to God...so much so that when He answers you, you are willing to give it back to the Lord unconditionally for His purposes? That is a heart test that Hannah passed. But she had to face one more test before she possessed her answer from God. It is called the "test of offense".

Hannah had gone to the house of God and this was the place where she was pouring out her heart in anguish, and she was being observed by Eli, the priest. And it happened, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli watched her mouth. Now Hannah spoke in her heart; but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!" What a perfect setup for Hannah to become offended at the priest for this false accusation and slander of her character. Eli was mistaken about Hannah and vocalized his false assumption.

Many people make "mistakes" about others and when they put those mistaken assumptions or mischaracterizations into words, they are offensive. But God has called us to keep our hearts free from offenses, always forgiving and never holding a grudge against others even when they do or say offensive things to us. People who pursue this type of loving lifestyle are able to receive easily from the Lord because there is nothing in their heart to block the flow of God's blessings into their life. If you sense a "block" in the flow of God's blessing into your life, an offense lodged in your heart could be the culprit.

Hannah could have responded in a most human way to this offensive remark by Eli. "You idiot! What kind of priest are you that can't tell a praying person from a drunk one??" But instead, she chose the way of grace (just like her name) and respectfully pointed out his mistake without condemning him for making it. **And Hannah answered and said, "No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine or intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord."** (v. 15)

Had Hannah responded with anger and resentment and stormed out of the Temple in reaction to Eli's insensitivity, she would have missed the blessing

and the answer from God. But she passed the "test of offense". Every person who lives on this planet will face the "test of offense". And every person who fails it will take a re-test. God has called us to live a life of love and forgiveness as imitators of God. (Ephesians 5:1) We are to forgive others as Christ has willingly forgiven us.

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us...(the word "as" means "in the same way")

We must constantly extend grace and forgiveness to people in order to stay in the "receiving position" of God's flow of grace and blessing to our own lives. When we refuse to extend grace to others for their shortcomings, God's flow of grace to us is cut off. And when you are waiting for God's answer you can't afford to cut off the flow of grace to your life! You are simply extending the process of time until you are willing to freely forgive, as you have been freely forgiven.

The last part of Hannah's "process" of receiving God's answer involved her coming to the point of simply believing that God was going to grant her petition. When she was finally able to rest in her faith that God was in the process of answering her, she was ready to receive. We see this clearly in her abrupt change of attitude and action in I Samuel 1:17-18.

Then Eli answered and said, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him." And she said, "Let your maidservant find favor in your sight." So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

Hannah had come to point of believing the word of the Lord through Eli. God wants us to believe His written word that says, ***He will fulfill the desire of those that fear Him...*** (Psalm 145:19) and ***...this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will...we know we have the petitions we asked of Him.*** (I John 5:14-15)

God wants to extend His grace and blessing to you and bring you to the place where you can say, "***It came to pass in the process of time....***"

But remember:

- 1) Don't let the devil provoke you with his lies about your "lack."
- 2) Don't allow yourself to become bitter, but instead turn to the Lord and pray with faith in His goodness.

3) Consecrate your answer to the Lord.

4) Rest in faith that your answer is in the process and on the way!!!!

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