

Pray: Speak to us now, O Lord God, our rock. You hear the cries of your people and answer the prayers of the faithful. Grant us the boldness of Hannah that we may persist in prayer, confident in your steadfast love. Amen.

**1 Samuel 1:4-20**

1:4 On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters;

1:5 but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb.

1:6 Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb.

1:7 So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat.

1:8 Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?"

1:9 After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD.

1:10 She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly.

1:11 She made this vow: "O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head."

1:12 As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth.

1:13 Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk.

1:14 So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine."

1:15 But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD.

1:16 Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time."

1:17 Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him."

1:18 And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer.

1:19 They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her.

1:20 In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the LORD."

## Proclamation of the Word

Tis' the season.

Yes, maybe you have noticed the onslaught of mail order catalogs arriving in your mailbox.

Catalogs from which you never ordered nor care to.

But they come, reminding you that it is the season of giving,

or on a more cynical note, a season when capitalism and Christmas merge.

Our Puritan ancestors would be horrified.

They did not even believe in celebrating the Christ Mass at all.

But according to tradition we know that they did believe in giving thanks.

So this week we will do just that.

That is a very different kind of season of giving.

One the people of faith know best. Thanks-giving.

I picked up one such catalog that arrived this week.

I flipped through it and stopped at this one t-shirt advertised.

On it surrounded by music notes, a treble clef, it reads,

"CAUTION: Prone to Sudden Outbursts of Song."

Sound like anyone you know?

Upon reading the Scripture this week, I could not help but think of Hannah.

"CAUTION: Prone to Sudden Outbursts of Song."

Like Miriam before her, David and Mary after her, Hannah sings.

Our story of God's people Israel broadly is always shown best in the particular.

Enter stage left- Hannah.

It is amazing that she gets so much press.

But God wants us to know her story- to hear her cries, and to learn from her sorrow and her response of giving thanks to God.

Our second reading is Hannah's Song, which we will get to,

but before she can rejoice and praise God, she laments.

After all, what is prayer, but the song in our heart?

And her song is a desperate one at first.

Hannah reminds us that we can take our deepest longings and most urgent needs to God.

Did you know that the word "prayer" comes from the Latin word which means "to beg" (*precari*)?

Prayer then is really a conversation between the worshiper and God.

Not the God who is somewhere out that, but that dwells in our hearts, God's spirit.

Mindfulness is the new buzz word in therapy, but it connects to our spiritual lives as well.

In an article, *The Mindfulness of Prayer*,<sup>i</sup> rabbi Steve Leder writes,

"I as a rabbi of more than 8,000 people in Los Angeles, I have never imagined God as a cosmic granter of wishes...when I pray for my father, whose Alzheimer's disease will only get worse until he dies, I am not praying for him to be cured, because I do not believe in prayers that cure...but prayers that heal. I pray for my family to heal together as we try to protect and comfort my dad as best we can. I pray for our broken hearts to heal with time. I pray for the healing that comes when we make peace with that which we cannot change."

He continues, "Instead of begging for things when I pray, I ask to be rid of things; to be rid of anger, arrogance and pettiness; to be rid of ego and anxiety and all joyless things that stand between me and my best self. The Hebrew word for prayer is *tefilah*...which means 'to reflect upon or evaluate oneself.'"

Leder is talking about praying when things are not ok, and nothing can be changed except our hearts and minds towards the will of God.

It reminds me of that great prayer in stained glass which hung in a window in my den growing up, "Lord, help me to change the things I can, accept the things I cannot, and the wisdom to know the difference."

I think someone gave it to my parents when my brother Les died in a motorcycle wreck.

But Hannah is not in that place is she?

She is begging for help- to change her circumstances, for God to intervene.

She weeps bitterly, grieves, and feels harrassed by her husband's other wife.

She cannot eat.

She feels abandoned by God.

That is a horrible place to be.

Her husband Elkahah feels helpless.

He loves her so much like God loves Israel.

He says, "Aren't I enough, Hannah?"

I imagine God knows how he feels.

God is always trying to tell Israel, "I alone am your God. I am enough."

When she goes to the Lord's house at Shiloh, she prays so hard,

the priest Eli thinks she is a drunk fool, but Hannah is beyond caring what people think.

She is pouring out her pain and disappointment to God.

Her song is a song of Lament.

Help me, Lord.

Like so many of the Psalms, prayers of complaint, lament, and crying out to God.

She is in the "Lament and Longing for Healing" part of the hymnal- the 700s.

Please turn to Hymn 776- "O God, be Gracious" (Psalm 4) and next is "How Long, O Lord" (Psalm 13).

In a minute we will sing 789 which is in this section.

That sounds a lot different than mindfulness.

Not just begging for God to change me, but to change the situation.

Scripture show us that we can be in Hannah's shoes sometimes,

and that is where we live for awhile.

We are not ready to accept things and far from ready to give thanks,  
even if the calendar and the grocery store ads tell us it is time.

She is not in denial.

Perhaps she knows that the first step is admitting your need, your problem,  
and laying it all out before God.

She is working through handing it all over to God.

Such is the process of prayer, sometimes.

Like we all do in our grief, Hannah begins to bargain with God.

"If you only look on my misery, Lord, and remember me, your servant, and not forget,  
and give to me your servant a male child, then I will dedicate him to you- he can be a nazirite, like an  
ascetic monk, who serves you all the days of his life."

She wants God to know she is God's servant, and she will raise her child to be a servant, too.

Even Elkanah's love was not enough, she needed God's love, strength.

She persists and persists in prayer- begging for God to hear her and answer her.

Have you ever been with Hannah? or been Hannah?

I have carried heavy burdens, working hard at giving it back to God.

I was holding on to my burden so tightly, but over time I was able to give it over to God.

There are days when I come to this Sanctuary, like it is Shiloh,  
and I walk these pews like an ancient labyrinth.

When I carry burdens of you this congregation heavy on my heart,  
I come here sometimes.

Sometimes I go to the Botanical garden or the dikes,  
but I have to move and pray God will move, too.

One particular day I was holding in prayer a family who has suffered for years with a terminal illness. The pain and the grief are so heavy, but so is the love. In my heart, I am singing, "I want Jesus to walk with me, with them."

I thought about the couple who so desperately wanted a child, but could not conceive. The in vitro fertilizations had been hard, but they were still trying, holding on to hope.

As I walk the pews praying not as much with words, but with a picture of all of them in my mind, I heard God's whisper, "Laura, give me that." After begging, bargaining, grieving with and for them, I can begin to hand it all over to God.

My mother, a breast cancer survivor,  
was diagnosed with COPD.  
We lived about 20 minutes away,  
but at home we had a preschooler and a kindergartner.  
Some days at church were 12 hour days,  
possibly with a run home to help with supper or  
give the kids their baths before returning to a meeting.  
Chuck and I shared all the workload. He was teaching, too.  
But I wanted so much to care for my mom,  
to quit my job and just do everything I could for her while I could.  
One night after one such 12 hour day, and a long session meeting, I went to her.  
I was so determined to help her, I found myself vacuuming her house at 11:00pm,  
knowing that at 6:30am the kids would be awake again.

As I drove home that night, I heard God say,  
"Laura, give me that."

And on the following Thanksgiving weekend while playing cards with friends at the beach and surrounded by most of our family, we did.  
She stopped breathing suddenly.  
My brother Andy immediately threw her into the truck, drove frantically to the hospital, and they hooked her up to a respirator.  
Previously in her last months, she had a couple of breathing attacks, he had done just the same thing.  
After one such rescue she said to him, "Andy, there was a time when I didn't know what to do with you. Now, I don't know what I'd do without you."

I received the call from my sister in law Terrie at 3:00am Saturday morning.  
We tucked our sleeping children into their car seats, and drove through the night.  
We arrived at 7:30am.  
I took one look at her, and heard God say, "Laura, give me that."  
I knew it was time to give her over to God, remove the tube.  
I called my brothers, told them it was time.

And like Hannah, a song that rose up from my heart to my lips is the one we sang at her funeral #819 in the "Living and Dying in Christ" section, will you turn to it with me?  
"Be Still my Soul" Can you help me sing?

Before we get to a song of praise, we can beg, plea, weep, and sing songs of lament.  
But the Lord heard Hannah's cries.  
Not only did she become a mother,  
but God's people received a wise prophet to lead them through a difficult period of history. God hears the cries of his people.  
And Samuel will lead his people through a dark time.  
There are threats from other nations outside of Israel as well as the threat of the corrupt leaders inside Israel.  
Reading further Eli's sons wind up being poor public servants.  
Outside threats and inside threats, Samuel will serve God's people and God's will.  
He will be the leader the people need, not just the gift for which Hannah prayed.

Hannah's song changes in mood.  
She knows this child will be God's child, as are all children- on loan for a while to us.  
When she asked God for a son, God replied, "Hannah, give me that."  
And she did.  
Grace received. Grace returned in thanksgiving.  
And then she can sing her song of Praise-

### **1 Samuel 2:1-10**

2:1 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.  
2:2 "There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.  
2:3 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.  
2:4 The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength.  
2:5 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.

2:6 The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up.

2:7 The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts.

2:8 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.

2:9 "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.

2:10 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."

Here sorrow turned into thanksgiving.

Like Hannah, give it all over to God trusting God's steadfast love and gracious will be done.

Let us sing the hymn *Saranam* which in India means "surrender".

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<sup>i</sup> Leder, Steve, "the Mindfulness of Prayer" in Time's Special Edition, *The New Mindfulness; Living, Thinking, Being*, 68-70.