

Product of Prayer
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1 Samuel 1:1-11

1 ¹⁻² There once was a man who lived in Ramathaim. He was descended from the old Zuph family in the Ephraim hills. His name was Elkanah. (He was connected with the Zuphs from Ephraim through his father Jeroham, his grandfather Elihu, and his great-grandfather Tohu.) He had two wives. The first was Hannah; the second was Peninnah. Peninnah had children; Hannah did not.

³⁻⁷ Every year this man went from his hometown up to Shiloh to worship and offer a sacrifice to God-of-the-Angel-Armies. Eli and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, served as the priests of God there. When Elkanah sacrificed, he passed helpings from the sacrificial meal around to his wife Peninnah and all her children, but he always gave an especially generous helping to Hannah because he loved her so much, and because God had not given her children. But her rival wife taunted her cruelly, rubbing it in and never letting her forget that God had not given her children. This went on year after year. Every time she went to the sanctuary of God she could expect to be taunted. Hannah was reduced to tears and had no appetite.

⁸ Her husband Elkanah said, "Oh, Hannah, why are you crying? Why aren't you eating? And why are you so upset? Am I not of more worth to you than ten sons?"

⁹⁻¹¹ So Hannah ate. Then she pulled herself together, slipped away quietly, and entered the sanctuary. The priest Eli was on duty at the entrance to God's Temple in the customary seat. Crushed in soul, Hannah prayed to God and cried and cried— inconsolably. Then she made a vow:

Oh, God-of-the-Angel-Armies,
If you'll take a good, hard look at my pain,
If you'll quit neglecting me and go into action for me
By giving me a son,
I'll give him completely, unreservedly to you.
I'll set him apart for a life of holy discipline.

1 Samuel 3:1-10

3 ¹⁻³ The boy Samuel was serving God under Eli's direction. This was at a time when the revelation of God was rarely heard or seen. One night Eli was sound asleep (his eyesight was very bad—he could hardly see). It was well before dawn; the sanctuary lamp was still burning. Samuel was still in bed in the Temple of God, where the Chest of God rested.

⁴⁻⁵ Then God called out, "Samuel, Samuel!"

Samuel answered, "Yes? I'm here." Then he ran to Eli saying, "I heard you call. Here I am."

Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." And so he did.

⁶⁻⁷ God called again, “Samuel, Samuel!”

Samuel got up and went to Eli, “I heard you call. Here I am.”

Again Eli said, “Son, I didn’t call you. Go back to bed.” (This all happened before Samuel knew God for himself. It was before the revelation of God had been given to him personally.)

⁸⁻⁹ God called again, “Samuel!”—the third time! Yet again Samuel got up and went to Eli, “Yes? I heard you call me. Here I am.”

That’s when it dawned on Eli that God was calling the boy. So Eli directed Samuel, “Go back and lie down. If the voice calls again, say, ‘Speak, God. I’m your servant, ready to listen.’” Samuel returned to his bed.

¹⁰ Then God came and stood before him exactly as before, calling out, “Samuel! Samuel!”

Samuel answered, “Speak. I’m your servant, ready to listen.”

Moving to Lakewood Ranch has brought me to back to an area that I have been vacationing all my life. We were fortunate enough that being from Orlando our easy escape to the serenity of the beach was only 2 hours away at my grandmother’s house on Anna Maria Island. Of course I hadn’t been on the east side of 75, but ever since I was a young child I can remember standing at the end of the Anna Maria city pier, gazing in awe at the monstrosity that floated in the distance. If you’ve shared this same view than you know I am referring to the Sunshine Skyway bridge. A bridge that stands taller and more bold than the bridge that occupied that space before it. A bridge that every time we crossed as a kid with my uncle John, my brother and I would be forced into singing “Amazing Grace” in order to provide him with the courage and comfort to reach the other side. See, this bridge represents different things to many different people.

Memorial day weekend my sister and brother-in-law invited me to join them at Treasure Island for the day, which meant I would be driving myself over the skyway for the first time. As I approached the beginning of the stretch of faith my heart began to race, my palms began to sweat, and I found myself talking aloud to God much like Hannah in her prayer at the temple of . A simple prayer, but one of “all hope given to you”. A prayer that asked for the spirit to calm my nerves and deliver me safely to the other side with the promise of my devoted service when I reached safety...but surely a

prayer littered with anxiety. I remember Eirinn Camphire talking about her bewilderment when she reaches the top of the skyway, astonished at the vast and beautiful creation God has gifted us....

In all honesty I was not in any state of mind to take my eyes off the road while crossing that bridge to appreciate anything around me regarding God's creation, except the continued prayer that those who designed and constructed this bridge had done so correctly. That prayer that continually asked more and more of God....Then all of a sudden you feel your car begin to increase in kinetic energy and fly down the lane on to the safety of the other side.

The Skyway experience leaves different memories for different people...Look at my incredibly hospitable host for the summer and a devoted disciple of Christ and Peace, Sue Seiter. Sue's husband Bob, who she loved and cared for dearly for, passed away last year, after having suffered a stroke.

After hearing of my first experience on the skyway, sue shared with me that for her, driving over that monument was a form of relief, letting things go, getting back to what was normal and being able to leave the pain of Bob's pain on the other side. A weight lifted from her shoulders. I think I can adamantly say this is a form of prayer...

Prayer, and especially worshipful prayer as we see in Hannah's case, is crucial to our development as individuals, as christians, and as members of a global society. Prayer is our direct-line, speed dial to communication with God. Billy Graham has been known to say that "Prayer is more than a wish, It is the voice of faith directed at God." It's funny to think of the times when that "voice of faith" plays a prominent role in our lives. Some of us maintain an awareness to pray consistently and with fervor each and every day. Some fall behind, lacking the necessary amount of prayer to be full in body, mind, and spirit. Many times I believe we fall back on prayer as a last resort and in these times that we rely on prayer, the times that prayer is our sense of solace and direction, what comes to mind? Those moments when we feel that the answers provided by worldly possessions is not acceptable we turn to God.

Hannah was a devoted wife, as was Sue, devoted people of prayer....I see prayer like a multiplication equation with two variables and one product. This equation to the product of prayer is displayed almost perfectly in Samuel. The first variable should

be clear as prayer cannot happen without us opening our hearts and speaking to the Lord...allowing that relationship to grow into something beautiful. Allowing yourself to have a voice of faith. Some do this better with their eyes closed, some with their eyes open...some heads bowed and some constantly moving, and some people to themselves while others feel the spirit to belt it from their soul.

In Samuel's case and maybe you as well, God opens the door to that relationship. It is he who speaks first. and what is it that Samuel does immediately? He listens. He jumps out of bed to Eli's side saying "You called?" Through the sheer ignorance of not knowing the Lord, Samuel was caught in misunderstanding. Yet once Eli realizes what is happening he commands him to return to bed and respond "I am here, your servant is listening." This is the second variable. To listen. Did you know that the word 'listen' uses the same exact letters as the word 'silent'? (Alfred Brendel). And when you combine the faith of prayer with listening to God you have Samuel... Hannah....Sue... a faithful listener...without Hannah's commitment to God, Samuel would not have been able to listen. He is the product of prayer. **OUR CALL DOESN'T EXIST WITHOUT PRAYER.** Samuel does not hear this call without the prayer from Hannah. If we are praying then we become products of prayer and in turn a faithful listener.

I think that too often we forget that second variable...we forget the importance of listening....listening to our neighbors, listening to people on the other side of the political spectrum, listening to those who are oppressed and searching for a reason to have hope...listening to God. We get caught up in the idea that FAITH means we must act... and often it becomes an act...we think that we must take the situation into our own hands and produce a suitable outcome. But faith is more than us "doing". Faith is rooted deeply in our willingness to LISTEN to others and to God. Our willingness to see the other side, the other perspective and in turn grow in our own understanding.

Kendrick Lamar, a rapper from Compton, California repeats in his chorus on the track "FEEL." The sentiment "Ain't nobody praying for me. Ain't nobody prayin' for me. Who prayin' for me? Ain't nobody praying".

Kendrick is partially right...too much of the time we get caught up in what WE are saying that we ignore our call to listen. The product of prayer is incomplete without

listening. Kendrick notes this in saying that “Ain’t nobody prayin...”. HOWEVER where I believe Kendrick missteps is his belief that no one is praying for him...Well the truth is someone somewhere is. Through other’s prayers for us we are connected further in our relationship to God, whether we know it or not. Here at Peace each and every one of you are prayed for **every single day by name** and kept in the hearts and minds of our congregation. To be where you are today SOMEONE had to be praying. Someone had to be listening and someone had to be instilling the wisdom and inspiration to persevere. Someone had to hear they’re own call and pray as a faithful listener of God. Listen Kendrick....Listen God’s people...Listen little children....in fact someone is praying for you. All you have to do is accept the call and respond “Speak. For your Servant is listening.”