

**1 Samuel 2:1-11**

**SI:** We’re studying the book of 1 Samuel.

It traces some of the most turbulent years of Israel’s history as the nation transitioned to a monarchy.

It’s a book that shows the failure of men, the power of God and what it means to live by faith.

The passage we are about to read is a prayer, a prayer in poetry or song.

Let me remind you of the context.

Hannah unable to have children, so her husband Elkanah took a second wife.

That was wrong of him, but it was socially acceptable in that culture.

Peninnah, his second wife was depressingly fertile and had one child after another.

She taunted Hannah and did all she could to provoke her and make her miserable.

Elkanah loved Hannah but he didn’t protect her from Peninnah’s taunting—and he didn’t understand Hannah or provide her with any real comfort.

It all came to a crisis point at their annual family trip to the worship festival at Shiloh. Peninnah was so cruel and Hannah was so miserable, she couldn’t eat.

So she went to the house of God to pray.

She told the Lord that if he gave her a son,

she would give him back to the Lord be a priest for the rest of his life.

The Lord answered her prayer, she had a son, named him Samuel—which means, I asked God for him.

When Samuel was four or five years old, Hannah and Elkanah took him to Shiloh and left him in the care of the old priest Eli, to be raised in the house of God as a priest.

When Hannah gave her son back to God, she prayed—and this is her prayer.

**INTRO:** I was in seminary with a friend who was smart and talented. In fact, he had so much promise that a well-known church called him as their pastor before he had even graduated. He was still in his 20s. And he came in as young men do, cocksure of himself and strongly opinionated, and it seemed to him that he was doing everything right, and that all his ideas were brilliant, and that everything he touched worked perfectly. The people were following his leadership and the church was flourishing.

He was there for 15 fruitful years and towards the end of his pastorate he found out that during those early years as a brash young man, there were two old ruling elders who had often gone around behind him soothing feathers. They had said to ruffled members: We know he's green as can be. But he's gifted and he means well and we know he's going to mature. Please be patient.

And please support these changes he's making. Yes, he could have presented them more diplomatically, but we think they will be good for the church. These two ruling elders were so respected and loved, that people listened to them, and they supported their young minister, gave him time to mature, which he did.

When my friend found out about those two elders, and what they had done for him, he laughed at himself and said, I thought it was all me back then. He had interpreted those early, formative successes as his doing and his talent. If he had been asked by a young minister just starting out, what should I do? He would have said: Here's how I did it when I was your age and it worked well. But then he discovered the truth, his interpretation of those early years changed dramatically and he was a better man for it—a more humble, grateful man.

How do you interpret the events of your life?  
Especially the good things—healings, deliverances, victories,  
business, financial, and relational successes, unexpected windfalls  
What do those things mean? What do they reveal?  
That's what this passage in 1 Samuel is about.

Hannah's prayer in poetry is her interpretation of this good event in her life—the reversal of her barrenness and the birth of her son. Commentators have pointed out that her prayer consists of three stanzas, with each stanza offering a different perspective.

What ties them together is that they are all deeply theological.

Hannah sees the Lord himself all in and around and over this event.

That in turn shapes her faith and character.

So let's look at Hannah's interpretation of this good thing in her life  
and think about how it applies to us, how we ought to interpret the events  
of our lives, particularly the good things.

Three points, I'll give them to you as we go.

**MP#1 First, you ought to interpret good things as the Lord's hand in your life.**

Not good luck, not good fortune, not your careful planning,  
not the natural processes and mechanics of things—the Lord's hand.

Hannah starts her prayer in the first person.

She mentions herself and her life.

My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high.

The horn of an animal represented its strength and glory.

What she says next explains what she means, still talking about her life:

My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance.

She's referring to her conflict with Peninnah.

Remember, Peninnah was referred to as Hannah's enemy, her rival.

So Hannah is saying: By doing this good thing for me, by giving me a son,

God has lifted me above my enemies.

He has put Peninnah down and has raised my horn high.

That might sound like vindictiveness, but it's not. It's a sense of vindication.

Specifically, it's the sense that her trust in the Lord has been vindicated  
by his active intervention in her life and on her behalf.

Remember, Peninnah's worst attacks on Hannah were leveled at her when  
the family had gone to Shiloh to worship together.

There must have been in her attacks the words or implication—

God's against you, Hannah, why you can't have children, he's punishing you.

Through the birth of Samuel, Hannah's faith was vindicated,

the Lord lifted her horn high and silenced her enemy Peninnah.

The important point is that Hannah interpreted the birth of her son  
as the Lord's direct intervention in her life.

She believed he really and truly cared about the grief she was getting from

Peninnah and that as a response to her tears he intervened.

And that's how you ought to interpret every good thing that comes your way—

big or small—as coming to you from the Lord himself,  
actively overseeing, working, intervening in your life.

Some Christians are good at doing this. I'm not.

I always stand in awe of Christians who always see God's hand in good things big  
and small and who say so. There are lots of you in this church who do that well.

I've found there are several things that trip me up, I have to push against.

My plans. I often tend to interpret good things as the result of my plans.

If I thought it through and did my best to foresee every contingency and the thing works out and it's good—then I tend to interpret it that way—not as God's hand.

On our vacation two weeks ago I made some fairly complicated plans for all of us and my parents and my sister and her family to go up to Virginia to ride a bike trail called the Virginia Creeper.

Every little detail of my plan fell into place. Plus, it was a spectacular day—sparkling blue skies, fields, creeks, waterfalls, barns, ferns, forests.

Everybody was happy and raving about and I thought—Didn't I do good!

No—My heavenly Father reached down and graciously arranged so that our entire family could enjoy each his creation and each other's company.

Happenstance is another thing that trips me up.

When good things just fall out of the blue. I tend to think. Oh, that's fortunate.

Not—Look what God did.

Natural processes is the other thing that trips me up.

I tend to think it rained because of return to regular weather patterns.

No—the Lord had mercy on our dry state and finally intervened.

Of course the Lord almost always works through secondary means.

He uses our plans and happenstance events and natural processes.

But what faith does is interpret those events as his hand in our lives.

So if you're like me, repent of your faithlessness and make a conscious effort to acknowledge the Lord's hand when good things come your way.

**MP#2 Second, you ought to interpret good things as evidence of the Lord's character.**

In the next stanza of her prayer song, Hannah moves from her personal experience of the good thing God has given her to what God himself is like.

Look at all the things she packs into just a few verses.

He's holy. She says:

“There is no one holy like the LORD, there is no one besides you.”

God's holiness is not just one attribute among others,  
it's a way of expressing his consummate perfection and total glory.  
There's that line in the hymn *Holy, Holy, Holy* which says—  
“there is none beside thee, perfect in power, in love and purity.”

Then she says that the Lord is unchangeable.

The theological term is immutability.

God doesn't shift and change like fallible human beings.

But Hannah doesn't use the term unchangeable or immutable—uses poetic image.

“There is no Rock like our God.”

She envisions the Lord as unmoving rock in desert where people can always find shade or refuge from enemies—which is what she found.

Then she says that God is omniscient. He knows all things.

“Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak with such arrogance,  
for the LORD is a God who knows.”

He knew what she was going through, the abuse had suffered particularly.

It was not hidden from him.

Then she says that the Lord is just. She expresses that with another image:

“By him deeds are weighed.”

So she pictures the scales of God's justice, weighting things out in her favor.

She doesn't just say: God did something good for me, he's a good God.

She ponders his holiness, immutability, omniscience, justice.

Then she begins to pray and sing about how the Lord typically acts in the world.

He breaks the bows of the warriors, but those who stumble, arms with strength.

He causes those who are full to be empty, but fills the hungry.

He gives barren woman seven children, causes woman with many to pine away.

He brings death and he makes alive, sends poverty and wealth,  
raises poor from the dust.

What's she saying about the Lord?

That the way he works in this world is to reverse fortunes.  
The point is not that being poor, hungry, or weak is virtuous in itself,  
or that being wealthy, full, and strong is wrong.  
It's a matter of who we trust and what we worship and where we turn  
when things are bad and who we believe is the source of all good.  
Those who are stumbling and hungry and barren and dying and poor—  
as they cry out to him in desperation and faith—he hears them and he lifts them.  
But those who are mighty and strong and full of food and money and power—  
those who are full of themselves—he tears them down.

Hannah interprets the good thing she got from God as an evidence  
and example of what God himself is like.  
Once again, we're all known Christians who do this well.  
Good things happen and their thoughts go to the character and habits of God  
himself—and they say—that's who our God is.

Let's move on to the last stanza and the last interpretation.

**MP#3 Third, you ought to interpret good things as a preview of the Lord's future reign.**

Hannah interprets the gift of her son as God's hand in her life,  
she interprets it as evidence of the Lord's character,  
and then she interprets it as a preview and foretaste of the Lord's reign.

Here's how she puts it. Listen how she speaks in the future tense, what will happen. He will guard the feet of his saints, but the wicked will be silenced in darkness. It is not by strength that one prevails; those who oppose the LORD will be shattered. He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.

She leaps from this good thing that God did for her, giving her a son,  
all the way to the future kingdom of God when everything is set right.  
One really remarkable detail is that she talks about a king over God's people  
who guards his saints and whose enemies cannot stand against him.

That's remarkable because there was no king in Israel at that time.

The kingship was just an idea.

She couldn't have known it, but her son Samuel would play a key role  
in the establishment of the kingship.

Hannah was prophesying.

She was prophesying King David who was the type and foreshadowing  
of the King of kings, David's greater son, King Jesus.

She says: When he comes, his horn will be exalted.

There's that idea again—strength, glory, vindication.

We've been focusing on good things, but there are plenty of bad things too.

We are living in a fallen world and Christ's reign is veiled.

His justice is restrained. He is allowing evil to continue for a while.

Sometimes the godless flaunt their wealth and power and crush the weak  
and they never experience a setback in this life and die peacefully in their beds.

Sometimes the godly suffer illness without healing and permanent barrenness  
and persecution without relief and sometimes they die at the hands of enemies.

It's all part of his the King's bigger plan.

But one day he will set all things right.

One day he will judge his enemies and vindicate his people and he will wipe  
away every tear from their eyes and there will be no more death or mourning  
or crying or pain for the old order of things will have passed away.

And here's the point: The good things we do experience now, big and small,



are previews and foretastes, and we have to interpret them that way.  
When the Lord gives you or someone else a good thing—a healing, a success,  
a sudden and surprising gift—  
Then you have to say: Praise God, that's how it's going to be all the time in  
Jesus Christ's eternal kingdom.  
And I'm going there. I have a place in that world of love.

This good thing God has given me is not heaven—I might lose it tomorrow—  
and something bad and overwhelming might come into my life.  
Nevertheless, by faith I believe it is a foretaste and appetizer of better things.  
When a person interprets the good things in his life that way, beautiful to behold.

This past Monday I visited Judy Taylor in the ICU of Huntsville Hospital.  
For those of you who don't know her, Judy was secretary here for over 20 years.  
She just retired last July.  
I had heard she had cancer and chemo and surgery and I had sent her a card,  
but I hadn't actually seen her and talked to her.  
The Lord arranged it all perfectly.  
I thought she was out of ICU, in private room, but she wasn't so I missed the  
visiting time. I buzzed the nurse's station but they wouldn't let me in.

I was standing there with a bouquet of flowers when a nurse came up  
and swiped her card to open the door and made a comment about the flowers.  
So I begged and groveled and she let me in.  
What was so nice was it was just me and Judy in her hospital room and it was like  
old times. It was like we were sitting together in the church office.  
We did our favorite thing for about half an hour, gossip about every one of you.  
When we were done with that, I finally asked her how she was doing.

And out of that beautiful woman came a song of Hannah.  
One expression after another of gratitude for the good things the Lord has done—  
the Lord's hand in her life, the character of God, her future hope in him.  
She told me that her cancer symptoms came on suddenly.  
She lost her appetite and 25 lbs in just two weeks.  
But after that, it has just been one good thing after another.

She was given the name of a highly recommended specialist.  
She called him at 11:00 am, and he had a cancelation at 2:00 that day!  
Her surgery went remarkably well.  
She has further treatment but an optimistic prognosis.

Then she said:

When I found out I had cancer I was mad at God at first.

This wasn't what I had planned for my retirement.

But if you could just know the good things that have happened because of it,  
and the wonderful things the Lord has done in our family,  
things that never would have happened otherwise, I wouldn't trade it if I could.

The LORD brings death and makes alive;

he brings down to the grave and raises up.

The LORD sends poverty and wealth;

he humbles and he exalts.

He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.

Give us the faith, O Lord, to see your good hand in our lives,

and to praise you for it!