

*Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival (Elkanah's other wife) kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on 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." As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine." "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "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." Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." – 1 Sam. 1:6-17*

As we approach Mother's Day here in COVIDland, we are looking at Biblical mothers. We looked at Mary yesterday, but today I want to look at an Old Testament mom named Hannah. Hannah is most famous because she is the mother of Samuel, the first of the Prophets. But she is a formidable woman in her own right. So as our "Shelter in Place" order drags on, we can learn a few things about endurance from this mom of the Old Testament.

Hannah was barren, meaning she could not biologically give birth. This is terrible for anyone at any time, but in Hannah's day, when the worth of a woman was judged primarily by her ability to bear children, specifically sons, this was not just a personal sorrow but a societal stigma. Hannah was an undesirable, and her fellow wife (Elkanah her husband had two) never let her forget it. "Year after year" Hannah had to watch this woman give birth again and again, providing Elkanah with heirs, beloved children, and solidifying her place as the "true mother" of the family. And year after year, Hannah brought her distress and disgrace to the Lord in prayer. She prayed so regularly and fervently that Eli the priest, the man who would eventually raise her son, assumed she was drunk. Now THAT is some hard praying!

Hannah spent years in this state, barrenness leading to mockery leading to fervent prayer. And nothing changed, "year after year". Until it did. Finally, her disgrace is lifted, her distress is eased, and she fulfills the vow she made to God, to give her firstborn son to the work of the Lord. Hannah gives birth to Samuel who goes on to anoint the kings of Israel.

Mothers must endure a lot. This is something every mother can tell you. From disrespectful kids to ungrateful husbands to over expectant bosses to sexist societies, mothers simply won't get their way in most things, and so they must endure. But they are usually pretty stellar at it. If you want to see models of endurance, visit a pregnant mom, or experience your own child being born, or once again come home and ask "what's for dinner?" of your wife who has done more in her day than you have all week. Mothers endure.

So let's think about what we can learn from Hannah about endurance. First, life will be unfair, but this does not mean God has forgotten you. Second, we can never stop praying for what we want, even if those prayers go unanswered again and again. Third, God's plan is all about timing, so don't rest too much on your own understanding. Finally, God is faithful, so celebrate when a prayer is answered.

Questions for today:

1. What prayer have you been offering for a long, long time?
2. Can you keep enduring unanswered prayer, and keep praying regardless?
3. Have you celebrated the prayers that are answered recently?