

Hannah's Story: 'For This Child I Prayed'

Story-teller: Hannah stood at the door of her small house and watched the children playing in the yard. Her eyes fell on Samuel, her four-year-old, trying to keep up with his older step-siblings. He was such a beautiful boy, with golden curls and large, questioning eyes. Ever since he learned to say a few words, it seemed he had been asking questions. Hannah smiled, watching his little legs running toward her.

"Thank You, God," she whispered, gathering him up in her arms. "I prayed for this child for so many years, and now here he is, in my arms." She laughed and kissed the wiggling boy who scampered down and began to run again.

Tammy: Welcome to *Women of Hope*. I'm Tammy and it's so good to have you with us today. I can't wait to hear the rest of this story. Let's listen in.

Story-teller: That night, as she did every night, Hannah took the small oil lamp into the room she shared with her son and sat down on his sleeping mat to pray with him.

"Mama, today we saw a blue bird," he whispered, excitement in his soft voice. "Mama, why did God make all the birds different colors? And, Mama why did He make trees for them to live in?"

He had so many questions—especially at bedtime—and Hannah tried to answer all of them, as best she could.

She also spent time sitting under the shade trees with him, telling him stories of their ancestors. She told him how God rescued His people from cruel taskmasters and gave them their own land—the land where they now lived. She wanted Samuel to know that God truly cared for His people, and protected them from great armies and cruel kings. Samuel, small as he was, would clap his hands and laugh when she told of armies being defeated, or angels rescuing people. She was amazed at what he remembered. But his questions kept her busy thinking of the right answer. It was important to Hannah that Samuel know the truth about God.

"Does God love me too?" asked Samuel one day, as they sat under the big tamarisk tree.

'Oh yes, my son. He loves you very much. In fact, He has a big job for you to do for Him...'

"What job, Mama?" Samuel asked as he crawled up into her lap and laid his hand on her cheek.

"One day, when you're older, you will tell people about how much God loves them."

"But, Mama. Don't they already know? Didn't their mamas tell them too?"

Hannah had to smile at her son's question. Then she shook her head and said. "No, my son, not all of God's people know about His love."

"I want to tell them!" Samuel said.

"You will, my son. But just now, run and play until I call you to supper."

Hannah sighed, as she remembered...

For many years she had prayed and prayed for this child. Her husband's other wife had many children and Hannah had wept oceans of tears while begging God to help her get pregnant. She knew her husband loved her. He always told her so when he saw the sad look on her face.

"Why do you weep, my beloved?" her husband Elkanah asked. "You are my dearest wife. Am I not more to you than ten sons?" He just didn't understand her deep sorrow.

Hannah tried to hide her tears, but when they went up to the temple one year to worship, she found

herself praying and weeping, so that her lips were moving.

Old Eli, the priest who was almost blind, scolded her saying, "why are you drunk here at the temple?" "Oh no, Sir," she blurted out. "I am asking a special blessing of the Lord—that He would open my womb and give me a son."

Then Eli blessed her and said, "May the Lord grant your prayer before this time next year."

And, sure enough, before it was time to go back to the temple the next year, Hannah had a baby boy! When she felt him stir in her womb, she could hardly believe it, and when she first saw him, screaming and red all over, she laughed with joy...

She said, "for this child I prayed, and the God of Heaven answered my prayer. He will serve God all his days."

Hannah often wondered if she could ever answer all of Samuel's questions. How could she, a simple woman, prepare him to be a man of God?

As she stirred the coals for the supper fire, she thought about all the prayers for help she had sent up, and felt she could almost hear God's voice saying to her, "well done."

Tammy: Let's leave the story here for a moment and think about how Hannah talked to this little son of hers.

Did you notice how careful Hannah was to answer all her small child's questions? It's not always easy is it? If you have a young child, or you sometimes take care of someone else's young child, you'll know how many questions they ask. And they don't always ask these questions at a convenient time for us, do they? No – young children will ask a question as soon as it pops into their heads. It is so important for us as we care for our children to answer their questions the best we can. Take the time at that moment to answer.

Carol: This is so true. I can remember my own children doing this.

Tammy: And mine still do. A young child can't keep the question for later – they need to know now. Later they will have forgotten what their question was. And the more we answer their questions as they discover things around them, the more questions they will ask.

Carol: Oh I remember that!

Tammy: Friend, did you teach your child to ask questions? ...I'm sure your answer is 'No'. So how come they ask them all the time? Well, this is the way God made each of us so that we learn. If you always tell your children you're busy and don't have time to answer their questions, do you know what will happen? Yes, they will eventually stop asking. And if they stop asking questions they will stop learning.

Carol: We all want our children to do well in school and to become good hard working adults, don't we? So to help our children with their learning throughout their whole life, we need to encourage them when they are young, just like Hannah did. When Samuel asked her questions about the birds and the trees, she answered him the best she could.

And when he asked questions about God, she told him all about God and the stories of their ancestors...how God had taken care of them, remember?

And when he asked about his future...what he was going to do when he grew up, she gave him the best answer she could. She told him what she understood about how he would grow up to tell others about God.

Can you imagine what it must have been like in this busy household that Hannah and her little son, Samuel lived in...?

Story-teller: It was early morning. Hannah's husband, Elkanah, had already left for the fields. The other wife, Peninnah, was feeding her newest baby while her five older children ate their breakfast. Four-year-old Samuel and his mother, Hannah, were finishing their oatmeal.

"Hannah, come and get these messy dishes. Can't you see that I'm busy feeding the baby?"

"Yes, Peninnah, I see you are very busy with little Caleb. I'll be glad to help out and wash the dishes. And, afterward, the older children may join Samuel and me in the yard, for a story."

"Whatever you say...only get them out of my way. I was up three times in the night with this baby, and I need some rest. You can't imagine how hard it is, having so many children."

Hannah began clearing the table. The children followed her to the kitchen where she put away the food and dumped dishes into a large pan of soapy water.

Peninnah stood in the doorway, little Caleb on her shoulder.

"Of course, the Lord never blessed you with children until Samuel came along." She sighed. "It hasn't been easy, but I have given our husband four sons and two daughters."

After Peninnah left the room, Hannah prayed, "O Lord God, keep my tongue from saying the words that would hurt my husband's other wife. She seems to enjoy making my life miserable, but she doesn't know Your love and blessings as I do."

Opening her eyes, she gasped, and grabbed five-year-old Eli just before he fell into a bin of flour.

"You are a curious little boy," she said, "but that flour is freshly milled and must be kept clean for our family's bread." She set him on the floor. "Besides, you would look very funny all covered in white. Now, go, join your brothers and sisters."

As soon as the kitchen was clean and bread set to rise, Hannah took her broom outside where the children were playing.

As she swept the dirt yard clean, the children began begging for a story...a special one from God's word, the Bible. Soon, they were all seated under the big tamarisk tree and Hannah began.

"Once, long ago, God's people, your great-great-great-great grandparents, went on a long trip."

"Did ride camels and they live in tents?" Asked Eli

"They didn't have any camels, but, yes, they lived in many tents, for there were many, many people.."

"Where were they going?" Samuel wanted to know.

"Why did they leave their houses?" Amy asked with a wrinkled brow.

"Did they take their puppies and kitties with them?" Anna, the animal-lover wanted to know.

Hannah laughed. "So many questions!" she said. "Let me start again. The people were going to live in a new country God had promised them.. They would have nice houses there, and plenty of food to eat. But the trip was long, and the people, especially the children, got tired of walking."

"Didn't they have donkeys?" asked Saul, the oldest.

"Not enough for everyone to ride. You see, the people had been very poor in their old country. In fact, they were treated like slaves by the other people who lived there. That's why God gave them a new country."

"I'm glad He did," said Anna, sighing.

"God took good care of them, but one day they had a really big problem. They needed to cross a river."

"Why didn't they walk over a bridge?" Samuel wanted to know.

"They didn't have a bridge. The water was very deep. They didn't have any boats, either. There was just no way for them to get across. They were very sad. Some of them even got angry."

Now all their eyes were fixed on Hannah. "Then God did a wonderful thing. Just as the boys and girls were going to bed that night, a big, BIG wind came up. It blew hard all night, and in the morning . . ."

Hannah stopped. The children seemed to be holding their breaths.

"In the morning, the water was standing up in a huge wall." She raised her arms high. "And there was a big, wide path of DRY GROUND for God's people to walk across the river. When they were all across, they sang and thanked God, and then the water fell back down and it looked like a river again."

For a minute, no one made a sound. Then they began to jump up and down and clap.

"Soon, they were in their new, beautiful country," Hannah finished.

"Tell us another story," Eli shouted, as Hannah heard Peninnah call her name.

"That will have to wait until another day," she said. "Run and play now while I see what your mother needs."

Samuel followed his mother into the house, where she dipped a gourd into the water pot and filled a cup. She took it to Peninnah, who was folding her children's tunics and putting them into neat piles. She looked up as Hannah entered the bedroom. "Thank you, Hannah. I don't know why you are so good to me. I'm sorry..."

"It's all right, Peninnah. I know you're tired. Perhaps a cool drink will refresh you."

Later, as she kneaded and shaped the dough into loaves, Samuel, seated on a high stool, asked, "Mama, why are you so good to Eli's mama? She makes you work hard and she says mean things to you sometimes." He screwed up his small face. "It makes me sad."

Hannah put the last loaf into its pan and dusted the flour off her hands. "Son, I think it's because God is always showing me His love." She put her arms around the little boy. "He gave you to me, in answer to my prayers." She looked into his questioning eyes. "I want to share that love with Peninnah. Maybe one day she will know God's love and be happy too."

Samuel shook his head and jumped down.

"Now, while the bread is rising, let's get to your lessons." They sat at the table and opened a scroll filled with Hebrew letters. Hannah, who had been taught by her own father (one of God's priests) began to teach her son.

"One day you will be teaching others, at the temple," she said, even as a small sadness pierced her spirit. "You will live there, and people will come to ask you for help. You must know the Words of God. They will help you teach others how to live a life that pleases God."

Carol: I can't imagine how difficult Hannah's life was, with her husband's other wife saying hurtful things to her like that.

Tammy: Oh, I don't know... Many of us have people in our lives-even in our families-who don't know about God's love and seem to "enjoy making our lives miserable," as Hannah said. It might be a boss... or a neighbor... a mother-in-law... or even another wife.

Carol: But we never hear of Hannah saying any unkind things back to her, or even complaining to her husband? How could she do that? How could she always be so nice?

Tammy: I think it must have been, just as she said, God's love in her heart. Remember, she prayed long and hard - even wept - and then God heard her prayer and gave her a really special little boy.

She knew he would grow up to serve God in wonderful ways.

Carol: Hannah didn't even know about Jesus...she lived long before Jesus came to live in this world. And she had only a small part of the Bible to read. God must have loved her very much, and helped her with her faith so that she could teach Samuel.

Tammy: Yes, and you notice that she didn't just teach him through stories, or at the time of their lessons. It was also in the way she behaved all day. She worked without complaining and helped the other wife who was unkind to her.

Carol: That made an impression on little Samuel, and probably on the other children as well. It seems to me that Hannah often taught about God's love without even using words.

Tammy: It had to be difficult. I know I get tired and cross, especially when the children are fussy and demanding my attention, and dinner needs to be cooked, and the laundry is piled up.

Carol: But those are the times others are watching, and learning. It's how we react to the struggles of life that mean so much to members of our family. If we want them to know about God's love, we have to be careful in everything we do and say! And we need to always ask God to help us be kind and patient.

Tammy: I'm so glad that I know about Jesus, and that He lives in my heart too. I know I'm teaching my children every day, whether I mean to or not, and I couldn't do it without Him.

In our stories, we saw that Hannah loved God so much she was willing to let her son go many miles away live and live at the temple so he could work for God all his days. That would not be easy would it?

In another part of God's Book, we read about someone else who served God all his days. He was God's own Son, Jesus. It was not easy for Hannah to let her son go and live at the temple, when he was still young. It was not easy for God to send His only Son to earth to tell people about His love, but that's just what he did.

Jesus was a king in heaven, but he came to earth as a baby and lived in a small village with his mother and father. He listened to them and did what they asked him to do. He grew up and taught everyone about how much God loves them. He told many stories and answered many questions.

Sadly, his own people rejected him...they didn't understand who he was. And so the day came when He was crucified on the cross. He gave his life for all of us. He took the punishment that we deserve so that God could forgive our sin and let us live with him forever.

Dear friend, the children you teach today will grow up too soon. Ask God to help you answer their questions and be a good example in the way you live. And as they grow up maybe they can be like Samuel and teach others about God's love.

Carol: It's almost time for us to go now. I'd like to read you a little verse that talks about how we teach our children...

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn

If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight

If a child lives with fear, he learns to be afraid

If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty

If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient

If a child lives with encouragement, he learns to be confident

If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate others

If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice

If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith in himself

If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns that the world is an enjoyable place to live.

Tammy: So, let's remember: how we live is what we teach. I'm so glad we had this time together! We would love to hear from you. You can write to us at TWR Women of Hope. Our email address is TWRWomenofHope@TWR.org. If you want to hear this program over again, visit our website at TWRWomenofHope.org. Or visit our Facebook page.

We will look forward to being with you next time. Have a great week!