

When the Church Prays: Pouring Out Your Soul – 1 Samuel 1  
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Introduction:

The opening chapter of the book "Power of a Praying Parent" says, "It's the best of jobs. It's the most difficult of jobs. It can bring you the greatest joy. It can cause the greatest pain. There is nothing as fulfilling and exhilarating. There's nothing so depleting and exhausting. No area of your life can make you feel more like a success when everything is going well. No area of your life can make you feel more like a failure when things go wrong."

The job of being a mom is often complex. You're underpaid and over-worked. Seldom over-appreciated, and almost never finished, but it's your love for your children that keeps you going. Almost every mother wants their children to be safe, to be loved, and to grow up to be the best they can be. But what's the very best thing a mother can do for their children? How can moms have the greatest impact on their kids' lives? I believe the answer is prayer.

You can pray for your children when you're at work. You can pray for them when they're at school. Your prayers can pursue them to college, into their careers and relationships, or to the far corners of the world. Your prayers can mold, shape, protect, recover, and enrich them. And in praying, you can trust the Lord with their welfare and remain hopeful for their success.

Turn in your Bibles to the book of 1 Samuel chapter 1.

This month we're considering what happens when the church prays. And last week I issued a challenge that as a congregation, we become a people defined by our prayer life. And any obstacle that you face in life, through prayer, God can move it out of your way. And God is especially greater than any obstacle that faces the church and our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. And for the next few weeks we will paint the picture of what it looks like when the church prays.

Today I want to spend time showing you what it looks like when Mom's pray for their kids. And I hope that as we learn from God's Word you will be convinced that more than anything else you can do for your children, the BEST thing you can ever do for their life is to pray for them.

In 1 Samuel 1, we learn about a man named Elkanah who was basically a Godly man, but he had taken two wives. It has never really been God's will for men to have more than one wife, but his first wife Hannah could not bear children. So, Elkanah probably took a second wife in order to produce a legal heir to his estate. The Bible tells us that Elkanah's second wife Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

The family would go every year to the tabernacle in Shiloh to worship, and as part of that celebration, portions of the sacrifice were distributed to his wives and children. Pick up with me in verse 4:

4 Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. 5 But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. 6 And because the LORD had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. 7 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.

So as you might imagine, the two wives were jealous of each other and the attention they got from their mutual husband. Peninnah had children, but she never had quite the affection from her mate as Hannah had. The trip to Shiloh every year had to be difficult for Hannah, because it was a reminder that she had no children of her own. And she lived in a time and culture where a

woman's social status was based almost solely on how many healthy children she had borne to her husband.

Peninnah would use the opportunity each year to rub it in Hannah's face. And it upset Hannah so much she couldn't eat. To make matters worse, her husband was like most husbands. What I mean is, guys, have you ever come in the room and you notice your wife is upset. Maybe she's quieter than usual or maybe you can tell she's been crying. Our first thought is usually, "Uh-oh, what'd I do?!?" And we say something sensitive, like, "What's the matter with YOU?"

And sometimes, we really don't get it, after our wives try to explain what's going on. And after she tells you that her friend whom she usually has lunch with on Fridays has cancelled on her two weeks in a row at the last minute, and that for the rest of the day, your wife has pondered why they would cancel to the point when you got home and found her sulking on the couch. And then we say something wise like, "Aw, honey, that's not a big deal. Just get over it. If she cancels next time, just call me, and I'll have lunch with you."

Well the point is, even though he tried to do what was right and he really loved her, Elkanah didn't say what Hannah needed to hear.

8 Elkanah her husband 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?"

9 Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple. [b] 10 In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD.

So each year, Hannah was reminded of her inability to have children, and she would get upset and would cry out to the Lord for help. We don't know how many years this went on. And we can imagine she prayed about this more than once a year, but probably constantly.

There are couples today who have struggled, sometimes for years, to conceive children. The frustration and sadness can be overwhelming to them. It can lead to marital problems and even divorce. Christian couples, who pray constantly for God to give them children soon find themselves praying less if at all. They grow weary of not having their wish granted, and they cannot imagine a satisfying reason why God would not let them have a baby.

And in spite of the frustration, Hannah wouldn't give up on prayer. She continued to look to God to be her help.

Psalm 121 says, "I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."

My ministry friends Rusty and Kellie Russell found out several years ago that they were unable to have a second child. The doctors had told Kellie that Charlie, their first son, was a miracle and that she might never have another baby. They prayed and went to a fertility specialist, but nothing helped. They began pursuing adoption, but each effort fell through. For years, they tried to add to their family but met with disappointment each time.

A friend of Rusty's dad came to town one time. He had prayed many times for infertile couples, and more often than not they conceived children. The man was not a "faith healer" and doesn't even promote publicly the gift he believes God has given him, but he agreed to pray for God to give Rusty and Kellie another child. Two months later, Kellie became pregnant with their second son Tommie. Less than a year after Tommy's birth, Kellie became pregnant again, this time with Kimberly. Since then, they have had a fourth child, a son named Johnny.

Rusty's dad says he's wondered if he should call his friend back and tell him to amend his prayer before things get out of hand.

Sometimes the Lord answers prayer dramatically. Other times He doesn't. Sometimes our prayers never get answered the way we would like, and other times God answers right away. The important thing we learn from Hannah is this: even when we are hurt again and again, and even if we are tempted to give up, never stop praying. Never stop looking to the Lord to be our help. He hears us, and he has an amazing plan for us. We just need to trust him.

Hannah had prayed many times to conceive a child without success. And she still trusted the Lord. This time, though, Hannah's prayer WOULD BE answered dramatically.

Let's read on:

11 And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon 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."

Hannah had a godly vision for her son's life. She didn't just want a child, she wanted a son who would serve the Lord with his whole life. She would even make him a Nazarite, which was a special designation of Jewish people who abstained from alcohol, from ever touching a corpse, and from cutting their hair. The point is, before her son was even born, she had a vision for his life.

Moms, what is your vision for your children? It's vital to your success as a parent and to your child's life, especially their spiritual life, that you have a vision for their life. And then pray for God to accomplish that vision.

Proverbs 28:19, KJV says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Here's what we mean by a vision: A vision is a picture of a preferred outcome. It's a mental image of the outcome you desire. It's where you're headed, it's the destination you are trying to reach. And here's why a vision is so important: If you don't know where you're trying to go, they you have no basis for deciding which path to take.

In the book Alice in Wonderland, Alice comes to a crossroads. And she has to decide which way she will go. She asked the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.

"I don't much care where," said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.

Mothers need to have a vision for their children, even before they're born. If you want kids, what kind of child would you like? A lot of parents just want to raise their kids to stay out of trouble. You may know the things you DON'T want your kids to be or become, but what DO you want them to become?

Do you want your children to accept Jesus as their Lord and have a saving relationship with Him? Then pray for that. Decide how they might come to that decision. Who will lead them to Christ? How will they learn about Him? You should know that most people that accept Christ as Savior do so before the age of 18. Are you praying daily for that to happen? Will Jesus be the most important thing in their life, or will it be something else? There is almost no more powerful influence on a child's life than a praying mom.

What else do you envision for your children? Talk to God about what kind of values you want your children to have, and the decision you want them to make. Ask God for help when it comes to what your kids will do for a living, and that God will put good friends in their life who know Christ, and that they will make good choices about whom they date and marry and about their careers.

Mom's, there is nothing you will ever do for your children that will be better than praying for them.

Yesterday, Exie and I traveled to Roanoke Bible College for their Graduation ceremony. My mentor Bob Russell was the commencement speaker, and while there he was awarded an honorary Doctorate degree by the college for all his work in ministry. At age 23, Bob and his wife Judy went to work for a small congregation of about 120 people called Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, KY. When he retired in 2006 after more than 40 years of ministry, the church had grown to an average attendance of more than 18,000 people. There are literally countless lives that Bob has impacted for the kingdom of Christ, and now in retirement he continues to speak and lecture and hold retreats to encourage young ministers. When he accepted the honorary degree from RBC yesterday, he said he was humbled. He grew up on a farm in a little town in Pennsylvania, going to a small church of about 60 people. And God has done more in his ministry than he could have ever possibly asked or imagined, and that the honor we bestowed on him was really honor given to Jesus Christ.

But Bob did not grow up planning to be in ministry. He once wrote that he is only a preacher today because of his mother's prayers.

"When I was born," he writes, "my mother began praying that I would become a minister. She also did her part. She planted the idea in my mind when I was very young. She would occasionally hug me and whisper in my ear, "You'd make a good preacher someday."

When I became a teenager, my mother never mentioned the ministry to me. Years later I asked her why she didn't say anything to me in my teen years about entering the ministry. She wisely said, "That was the wrong time to mention it. I knew at that age you'd want to do just the opposite of what I wanted you to do!" But she continued to mention the idea to God in her daily prayers.

During my adolescence, being a preacher was the furthest thing from my mind. It wasn't cool to say you were going into the ministry, and I wanted to be popular. Also, I grew up in a small church where I wasn't exposed to many great ministry role models; so my opinion of preachers wasn't very high. I was into sports, and I thought I wanted to become a high school basketball or football coach.

But the primary reason I didn't want to preach was that getting up in front of people terrified me! I hated public speaking. I even trembled when I had to read aloud in front of the class.

During my last two years of high school, I gave my mother a lot of gray hair. I'm sure at times, rather than praying I'd be a preacher, she just prayed I would be a Christian! But in April of my senior year, I had a change of heart. My dad took me to visit a secular college I thought I wanted to attend in the fall. In the way home, as I reflected on the visit, I told my dad I knew that wasn't where I was supposed to go. I came home and told my mother that I had decided to go to Cincinnati Bible College and study for the ministry. The announcement was unexpected, and my mother wept, which she didn't do very often. At the time I didn't understand why. I didn't know she'd been praying for so long that I would enter the ministry. I've since come to understand why I felt the way I did on that trip home. I was moved to enter the ministry because God still answers prayer."

Mom's, parents, we serve a God who still answers prayer. What are you praying for your sons and daughters to be? It takes having a godly vision for their future, and praying that God will make it so.

Looking on in our text, picking up in verse 12

12 As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk 14 and said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine."

15 "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. 16 Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

While Hannah was praying almost silently, the priest Levi noticed her and thought she was drunk. But she explains that's not it at all. She was deeply troubled, and she was pouring out her soul to the Lord.

On the surface, prayer seems fairly straightforward. It's talking with God. And that is true, but it is more than that. When we pray, our souls are communicating directly to the Lord who is the creator of everything, and His ear is inclined to us. And sometimes prayer needs to be intense. WE ought to have a sense of urgency when we pray. There ought to be something at stake, and we need to boldly make our requests known to God.

Have you ever been in that moment where you're wounded, and you're urgently pouring out your soul to God? In those moments, even when we don't have the words to express what we think and feel, our God hears us.

Romans 8: 26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

I read an article this week that said, *"Prayers that reflect the will of God but are prayer in apathy have little effect. A deep hunger for that which you seek is a must for tapping into the power of prayer. Jesus said, 'Seek and you will find.' Seeking requires a demonstration of sincerity. You will not seek over the long haul what you don't really want. Seeking reveals the passion of your heart. Ask yourself, 'Am I willing to sacrifice in order to see God answer my prayer?'" (Lookout, Feb. 3, 2008, P. 6).*

For many of us, prayer is something we think of happening in church or Sunday School, or at the Hospital or a Wedding. But folks, there is a whole other level of prayer that God has called each of us to live.

Psalm 34:17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.

Psalm 55:17 Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice.

Psalm 57:2 I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills {his purpose} for me.

Psalm 84:2 My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the LORD; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.

Psalm 42:1-4 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" 4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul.

God has called us to pray with urgency and intensity for the desires of our hearts. And as our relationship with Him grows and we mature in our walk with Christ, those desires in our soul will be less about what we want, and will become more about becoming and doing what God wants.

Let's read together what finally happens for Hannah after she has cried out to the Living God. After she explained to Eli that she was not drunk, but merely praying:

17 Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

18 She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

19 Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her. 20 So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, [c] saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."

Prayer revives the soul. Hannah did not know she would conceive a son for sure, when she went away and ate something. But after laying her burden in the hands of her Lord, she did not worry about it anymore. Prayer restores our soul.

In the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm, David reminds us that our Lord is our shepherd, and when we trust in Him and lay our burdens before Him in prayer, he fills us back up. My cup overflows, he restoreth my soul."

And as he demonstrates for Hannah, the Lord answers prayer. v 19 says the Lord remembered her. She was finally able to conceive children, and her son Samuel grew to become a powerful servant of God, just as his mother envisioned.

Mothers, you can see in Hannah an example of a woman who prayed for her children, even before they were born. She had a godly vision for them, and she let her requests be known to God. And the Lord heard her prayers.

But all of us can learn from her example, not just the mothers. Because in Hannah we learn that prayer needs to be intense and deliberate. When we pray, heaven hears us, and God still answers prayer.

And when we connect with God in that way and pour out our soul to Him, He restores our soul. Prayer isn't something a priest or a minister does for us. It's the way God chose for us to speak with him directly. And that direct line of communication was provided by Christ. The Bible says:

1 Timothy 2:5-6 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6who gave himself as a ransom for all men.

We pray through the name of Jesus Christ, and by the power of his Holy Spirit in us. But only those who have chosen to make Jesus the Lord of their life and been baptized into Him have received the Holy Spirit.

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