

“I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME:
V- ‘PRAY!’”

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I Samuel 1:1-28

Just as I sat down to begin writing this sermon, I happened to see a quote on line that jumped off the screen at me. It went like this: “And she loved a little boy very, very much, even more than she loved herself.” I clicked on it and delved into its origins and discovered it was part of a line from *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein – and also discovered that the first words in the quote were actually, “Once there was a tree, and she loved a little boy” and so on.

Nevertheless, the words stuck with me, because they immediately made me think of the central character in this morning’s lesson from the Hebrew scriptures. Her name was Hannah. She was married to Elkanah, and from what the scripture says, they deeply loved each other. The only sadness in their life was their inability to have a child together – and it was an incredible sadness and burden especially for Hannah.

Elkanah also had another wife whose name was Penninah. She was able to have children, and even though she was incredibly blessed by that, sadly she found

it necessary, for some reason, to parade that fact in front of Hannah. The scripture says she “provoked Hannah severely” about it. How unbelievably sad and mean!

So not only was Hannah depressed over her infertility, but hurt over the continual emotional abuse at the hands of Penninah. She had a really rough time, but she continued to have faith in God. She prayed, and prayed, and prayed, and finally, one day her dream came true, she became pregnant. And from that moment on, she dedicated that child to God.

When she gave birth, when Samuel was born, she, as Shel Silverstein put it so well, “loved that little boy very, very much, even more than she loved herself.” He was the greatest blessing God had ever given her, and Hannah kept the promise she had made to God when she was praying for a child so fervently – she gave him to God, entrusted him to God’s care and keeping, and into God’s service for the rest of his life.

While Hannah’s story is certainly dramatic, my hope is that all parents do what Hannah did – and I think they do – give their children over to God – because how else could you get through a single day of parenting without doing that – it’s too awesome a responsibility! I mean you do the best you can, loving them,

protecting them, caring for them, teaching them, guiding them, leading them – but there comes that point when they have to be on their own, and then what do you do?

Well, you do what Hannah did – give them to God, trusting God to watch over them, guide them, protect them, strengthen them, and walk with them. And you pray – without ceasing – to that very same God – for your children and yourself.

As we have in the past few weeks, this morning we're going to hear from some members of our church who have done just those things – given their sons to God with trust and faith. Two mothers – who are not just Moms, but military Moms – so giving their sons over to God takes on special meaning.

Let's hear their stories. Turn to the screen now and we'll hear from Gail Juergens and Nadine Allen.

VIDEO

You know, many of us here walked through those journeys with Gail and Nadine, and I don't know about you, but I marveled that they handled everything so well. I think if I had a child in the military, and especially in combat situations, it

would be very easy to go crazy with worry, and struggle not to let it overwhelm me every day. Yet, they didn't. And they didn't because they placed their trust in God, who they both knew loved their sons even more than they did. Sure they worried, but the worry did not consume them, because God was there. They turned to him in prayer for their sons and for themselves – and God was with them every step of the way.

Gail and Nadine didn't focus on the "what-if's" (all the bad things that could possibly happen). No, instead they focused on the "what is" and that is God, and God's love for their sons, his sustaining power and presence, his Spirit to help bear them through everything they faced, and God's love for them, that helped them go on with their daily lives not paralyzed with fear and foreboding but with calm.

Oh friends, even though we focused today on mothers, this story is not just for mothers or even fathers, but for all of us. Because it's about faith in God, trust in God, and strengthening our relationship with him and others through prayer. It's about knowing that, no matter what, God is there and he loves all of his children, and we can face whatever comes with his help. And that the best way that we stay connected to him is through prayer.

So pray for your children, pray for your family and friends, pray for yourself and trust God with it all – everything. If you do, then, like Gail and Nadine, you will know that “when peace like a river attendeth your way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever your lot, God had taught you to say, ‘It is well, it is well, with my soul.’” Thanks be to God!

Amen.