

A Gift with Strings Attached

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1 Samuel 1:1-20

A math teacher gives a problem to the students. “Pretend you are at home and there are seven members in your family: 5 kids, the father and the mother. If mom brings a cake and divides it equally, what proportion belongs to you?”

“A sixth is the answer.” The student replies.

“But I just told you there are seven members,” the teacher says.

“I know”, he says, “but you do not know my mother; she gives up her share so we will have more.”

What is it that mothers most of the time think about “others”, kids, family? Even Paul used the image of a nursing mother to explain his self-giving love and care caring for the believers.

How about women who wanted to have children, and they did not? Or those whose wishes in having children were delayed? What can we learn from those events?

In the Bible, we do see several couples facing this issue. I would like to give a great example of a situation like this that occurred during the **time of the Judges**. We read in 1 Samuel the story of a married couple, **Hannah and Elkanah**.

Elkanah, which means “**God has created**,” was a religious, pious man who loved to worship God and practiced all the necessary rituals.

Elkanah married Hannah, which means “**grace or graceful**.” It seems she would bring the grace of the Lord to the nation that *desperately* needed change. Why change? The situation of Israel was very bad and corrupt. Those days there were no kings; instead, judges and priests were the ruling class. **Eli** the priest was weak and his two sons were corrupt and they misused their office and position. **It**

seems no one was drawing near to God and listening to His VOICE. This was the situation.

Since Hannah was not able to bear children, Elkanah married a second wife called **Peninnah**, which means: “corals, rubies, jewels”. Imagine what Hannah felt every time this beautiful new bride bore children for her husband. Most likely she felt worthless. In those days, having children was extremely significant for a woman’s worth.

-Elkanah’s Offerings:

Elkanah was a religious man; he liked to perform his religious duties. Once a year he took his family to **Shiloh** to perform a thanksgiving sacrifice for his family. Unfortunately, we find that Eli’s two sons, the priests, were in charge of these sacrifices. These two men were thieves and abusers.

Hannah was not happy in this yearly pilgrimage. Peninnah also gave her tough time because Hanna was barren. Elkanah knew that his wife Hannah was struggling so he gave her a double portion of the sacrifice, as if that would help her relieve the pain of barrenness. In fact, not only it did not help her, but made it worse. She received it but she did not eat. She had a lot of questions in her heart to God. Many whys. Where are you, O God? Help? Why did this new woman Peninnah come into our family? She is like a “factory” producing children! And this happened year after year... (1 Samuel 1:1-20).

Questions, legitimate questions. Don’t we all face similar situations?

Imagine every year the entire family goes to this pilgrimage to offer sacrifices to God. Hannah is tired of those sacrifices. She is tired of receiving favors from her husband. On top of it all, Elkanah says to her: **“Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”** (1 Samuel 1:8 ESV)

Hannah is desperate.

-Stand up:

One of the years, Hannah had a turning point in her life. She stood up, and turned to God. I believe this is the turning point of the entire story, which changed her life and the life of the Israelites. Let us read:

After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose.She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. ¹¹ And she vowed a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.” (1 Samuel 1:9-11 ESV)

She rose, stood up and went to the Lord's house. She walked carefully and prayed a short prayer. She surrendered to God.

Hannah's prayer was from her deepest heart. She was ready **to be the mother of God's servant and to dedicate him to God**. She was not just interested in having a baby. She was not just interested in becoming a mother, for the sake of being a mother.

Being a mother is a joyful thing. I believe Hannah learned that being a mother was not the ultimate goal any more. The goal was to be an instrument for God, by dedicating the child and giving him back to God.

In Hannah's prayer, the word **servant** was used 3 times:

“O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your **servant** and remember me and not forget your **servant**, but will give to your **servant** a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.” (1 Sam 1:11 ESV)

“your servant, your servant, your servant...then she is declaring herself a servant dedicating her child to be a servant of God.”

Being a surrogate mother for God's future servant becomes the supreme privilege of her life.

This is the turning point of the story. And I want to preach this point to all mothers and fathers, that to be parent is not the ultimate goal. To learn to be a parent that God will use you to raise a family that will be God's servants.

Application:

1. Being a mother is a gift with responsibilities. Let us not take becoming a mother for granted. Let us also remember that having a child does not automatically make you a mother.

I have seen biological mothers who did not take care of their kids for different reasons. The good news is that I have seen "new mothers" who step in to take care of those children. I have seen how families accept such children in their midst, and I have huge respect for those "mothers."

Motherhood is a gift with attachments. You bear the child, you nurse the child, you feed the child, you change diapers, you help them to go to school, you cry with their pain, you laugh with their joy, you see how they graduate, you guide them in their spiritual life, you pray with them, you want to see their achievements, you are proud of them, maybe watch them get married one day, and you become a grandmother...

All these factors make you think, "This is my child, and it is MY CHILD. I own him/her."

And the fact is, no, our children ultimately belong to God. We cannot own what belongs to God. Our responsibility is to raise these children carefully surrendering them to God. Being a mother means you learn from God how to become a mother, or a father, or a parent. Our ultimate parenthood comes from God himself who takes care of His children.

2. Don't blame God or others when things don't happen the way you want.

Hannah was in pain. Her self-esteem was crushed. Yet, she did not fire back at Peninnah or her husband. She was silent. She stood up one day and brought her tears and petition to God in prayer. **Prayer can change things.** Prayers are effective. Praying with a broken heart and in desperate surrender is extremely

important. Jesus tells us the parable of widow who brings her petition to the judge. In good days and bad days, persistent prayer, by desperately coming to the Lord to fill us with His presence, is the way God shapes us.

SURRENDER INSTEAD OF BLAME.

3. Becoming a mother is not an ultimate goal.

What are we praying? What are we asking for?

We all know people who prayed for a child and did not have one. They did not give up from being mothers, teachers, and aunties for many children. They dedicated their lives to serve God.

Remember how Hannah came to God. Hannah was not just interested in having a child; **she was interested in being an instrument of God. Hannah became a new person.** The Grace of God consumed her and transformed her. Let me repeat again, **having a child was not the goal anymore; being an instrument of God was.** God brought the change to the rotten world. Samuel* became the voice of God who anointed David to be the king.

I guess the question is, “What am I praying for? Why am I praying?”

How about you and me, mothers and daughters, fathers and sons...

* **Samuel (Shamouel)**. Scholars believe that this name is the synthesis of two words: **Shaal (Ask)** and **M-El (from God)**. Some say God heard is the meaning of Samuel.