

Situations reversed

1 Samuel: Lessons in leadership – Session 1ⁱ



To show us that God exercises his leadership by bringing down the proud and raising up the humble from 1 Samuel: 1:1 – 2:10.

Q1. Can you think of a situation where you thought you would lose out but instead you ended up winning?

The book of 1 Samuel begins when Israel was a loose confederation of tribes led by a judge. A “judge” was someone whom God “tapped on the shoulder” to lead the people (whereas kingship was an inherited position). During the book of 1 Samuel, Saul and then David become kings of Israel. David was king roughly around 1000 BC.

1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:10

1 There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. **2** He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

3 Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. **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** Because the LORD had closed Hannah’s 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. **8** 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?”

9 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. **10** In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. **11** 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.”

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 are you going to stay drunk? Put away 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.”

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 made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. ²⁰ So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel,^[a] saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."

²¹ When her husband Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vow, ²² Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the LORD, and he will live there always."

²³ "Do what seems best to you," her husband Elkanah told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his word." So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

²⁴ After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah^[b] of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh.

²⁵ When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, ²⁶ and she said to him, "Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. ²⁷ I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. ²⁸ So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

2 Then Hannah prayed and said:

"My heart rejoices in the LORD;
in the LORD my horn^[c] is lifted high.

My mouth boasts over my enemies,
for I delight in your deliverance.

² "There is no one holy like the LORD;
there is no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.

³ "Do not keep talking so proudly
or let your mouth speak such arrogance,
for the LORD is a God who knows,
and by him deeds are weighed.

⁴ "The bows of the warriors are broken,
but those who stumbled are armed with strength.

⁵ Those who were full hire themselves out for food,
but those who were hungry are hungry no more.

She who was barren has borne seven children,
but she who has had many sons pines away.

⁶ "The LORD brings death and makes alive;
he brings down to the grave and raises up.

⁷ The LORD sends poverty and wealth;
he humbles and he exalts.

⁸ He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

he seats them with princes
and has them inherit a throne of honor.

"For the foundations of the earth are the LORD'S;
on them he has set the world.

⁹ He will guard the feet of his faithful servants,
but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.

**“It is not by strength that one prevails;
10 those who oppose the LORD will be broken.
The Most High will thunder from heaven;
the LORD will judge the ends of the earth.
“He will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed.”**

- a. **1 Samuel 1:20** Samuel sounds like the Hebrew for heard by God.
- b. **1 Samuel 1:24** That is, probably about 36 pounds or about 16 kilograms
- c. **1 Samuel 2:1** Horn here symbolizes strength; also in verse 10.

Q2. What impression do we get of Elkanah? (Note: polygamy wasn't actually a common practice in the Ancient Near East. The only men with more than one wife tended to be those who were wealthy).

• Elkanah appears to be a man of standing – indicated by his pedigree & dual marriage (1 Samuel 1:1-2). Immediately his domestic problems become apparent – only one of his wives has children. We are left with the distinct impression of Elkanah as pious and concerned but powerless. He piously makes the yearly pilgrimage to sacrifice to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:3). He deeply loves Hannah, offering her a double share in the sacrifice (1 Samuel 1:5). Yet he cannot understand her inconsolability over her barren state, nor can he do anything about the situation anyway, because the text tells us God has closed her womb (1 Samuel 1:5,8).

Q3. What impression do we get of Hannah?

• The impression of Hannah is that she is very distressed by her inability to have children (1 Samuel 1:6-8) and that she is a pious woman, who desperately cries out to the Lord (1 Samuel 1:11). Interestingly the first words Hannah speaks are her prayer to God (how characters are introduced shapes how we understand them).

There are 3 things about Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 1:11 that are worth us exploring:

1. Hannah asks God to 'remember' her. When we use the 'remember' we think of recalling to mind something we once knew but had forgotten about. For God to 'remember' is for him to take action on a promise. The question here is: did God make a personal promise to Hannah that she would have a child? We don't know from the text. But Hannah would have known of this promise to the Israelites "You will be blessed more than any other people; none of your men or women will be childless" (Deuteronomy 7:14).

2. Her vow to the Lord if he gives her a child (1 Samuel 1:11). This vow has overtones of a Nazarite vow. A Nazarite vow was a special vow of separation or dedication to God, involving abstaining from wine and the razor (Numbers 6). The difference with Hannah's vow is that it is permanent – for 'all the days of his life'. The last judge/deliverer in Israel was Samson, and he was a Nazarite – so is Hannah asking for deliverance not only from her own problems but for a deliverer for her people as well?

3. The bargaining element to language of 'if ...you will give to your servant, then I will give him to the Lord' (1 Samuel 1:11). This is not an unusual way to pray in the Old Testament.

Q4. Hannah prayed for a son and her request was granted. Is that licence for followers of Jesus today to pray and expect God to answer like he did Hannah?

• There's no promise in the Bible that God will answer every prayer we pray in the way that we want. We must therefore take Hannah's prayer as descriptive of a principle – that God is a God of blessing – rather than proscriptive of how God operates in every case. Part of allowing God to be God is letting him bless/answer prayers in the way that he wants.

Q5. Hannah made a vow to God in return for granting her request. If we're a follower of Jesus, is that licence to 'bargain' with God? (hint: the answer has something to do with the fact that New Testament believers could call God "father", which Old Testament people couldn't do)

• The short answer is: followers of Jesus have no need to bargain with God! Their relationship with God is a family one (thanks to Jesus) and with that comes a confidence to approach God for anything and everything.

Q6. In Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, how does God exercise his leadership?

• God exercises his leadership by bringing down & raising up. Hannah celebrates God's holiness, faithfulness (this seems to be the primary idea behind the image of 'rock' – the idea of being unmovable and dependable), uniqueness, all-knowingness, his justice (1 Samuel 2:2-3). What becomes prominent however is God's authority to reverse the fortunes of the weak and the strong (1 Samuel 2:4-5). 1 Samuel 2:6 is a good summary statement: "the Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grace and he raises up" – of which Hannah then illustrates with further examples using poverty and wealth. It is God's prerogative to reverse situations, since the earth is his (1 Samuel 2:8). The division between those whom the Lord upholds and those whom he shatters, becomes very clear (1 Samuel 2:9-10). Any strength raised in opposition to the Lord is no strength at all – only what the Lord strengthens will stand – Hannah and the king included (1 Samuel 2:1,10).

The words of Jesus – Luke 18:9-14

⁹To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

¹³"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

¹⁴"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Q7. Again we have the principle of God raising up and bringing down (which is not surprising really, because the character of God doesn't change throughout the Bible). What does it mean to "exalt yourself" and what does it mean to "humble yourself" before God?

• Exalting yourself means being confident of your own self-righteousness before God (Luke 18:9). It is based on the perception of your own good performance (Luke 18:11). It manifests in a condescending attitude to others who don't measure up (Luke 18:9).

• *Humbling yourself is recognizing that before God you're got nothing to contribute, because you're a sinner (Luke 18:13). All you can do is rely on God to have mercy (Luke 18:13).*

Q8. If it's important for followers of Jesus to be humble, what does this mean for:

1. How we treat those who are lower on the pecking order
2. How we talk about our strengths and achievements
3. Those of us who are "control freaks"
4. How we relate to God when life is tough
5. When God doesn't answer our prayers the way we want

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