

Adult Teaching Resources

November 18, 2018



Doing, and Being (September 2-November 25)

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 – “Remembering Always”

1 Kings 17:8-16 – “Doing Faith”

1 Samuel 2:1-10 – “Singing Joy”

Daniel 7:1-14 (RCL 7:9-10, 13-14) – “Dreaming Hope”

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FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“There is no Holy One like the LORD, no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.”
1 Samuel 2:2

How do we respond to God? How do we respond to a friend? With a friend, we can laugh, cry, hug, etc. But with God, it might feel a little weird to react like that.

Responding to God in an appropriate way might be one of the most challenging opportunities we have. One model we have is from Hannah and her prayer found in 1 Samuel. Today, we explore her powerful, emotional response to God.

Opening

After welcoming everyone to the class time, ask your group this question:

How do you respond to God?

Write the answers on the board or on a large sheet of paper that everyone can see. Referring back to the list, with what responses are we comfortable? With what responses are we uncomfortable?

Spend some time sharing ideas about our comfort and discomfort responding to God before moving to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

For today’s time in the Bible, break your group into smaller groups of 3-4 in a group. Then, give each smaller group 2-3 verses of Hannah’s prayer. Ask each group to re-write their assigned verses in words, images, and language used today. After each group has finished, reassemble the rewritten passage and read it out loud.

Then, ask these two questions for deeper understanding of the passage:

What did you learn about Hannah from her prayer?

What did you learn about God from her prayer?

Making Connections

What hardship and sorrow has been a part of your story? Where did you turn for help? Did you see God in this episode? If so, where?

What have you prayed for and God gave you the answer you desired? How did you respond?

What is your prayer concerning your enemies?

What is your prayer describing God's uniqueness?

Our Lesson Writer says, "The "reversal of fortune" theme continues in vv. 6-8, but with the reversals specifically credited to Yahweh. Yahweh has the power to kill and make alive, to send someone to Sheol or bring them back." Have you experienced a reversal of fortune that you can attribute to God? Explain.

How can you give witness to the greatness and power of God? How can you give witness to the compassion of God?

Our Lesson Writer says, "While those who are oppressed may sometimes feel their situation is hopeless, Hannah's song is a reminder that God can reverse the fortunes of the downtrodden, raising the righteous to replace the wicked in places of wealth and power." Who do you know that needs to know and understand this? What are you willing to do to make sure they get it?

So What?

From the large group, break into smaller groups. Once the groups have settled, ask them to think about the community around the church and around their neighborhoods.

Who/where are the privileged?

Who/where are the downtrodden?

How can individuals in the class be the presence of God to the privileged?

How can individuals in the class be the presence of God to the downtrodden?

How can this class be the presence of God to the privileged?

How can this class be the presence of God to the downtrodden?

Give each group some time to talk among themselves, then have each group share their thoughts and ideas with the larger group.

As a large group, decide on a plan for the class to minister to the privileged and the downtrodden. Make specific action plans.

The Challenge

This week, begin putting your class plan to minister to the privileged and downtrodden in action. What is your individual role? When will you accomplish your goal?

Prayer

Loving God, we know you love us and we know you provide for us. We try our best to respond in ways that you will hear and understand. Accept our offerings of thanks. We know you work in the lives of all those around us and we want to be your servants and help you reach both those who have much and those who have little. Open our eyes and hearts to all, Lord. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Vows in the Old Testament—While modern folk think of vows as unconditional promises, such as wedding vows or monastic vows, for the Hebrews and their neighbors in the ancient Near East, vows were expressly *conditional*. Narrative vows consisted of two parts: a specific request from God, and a promise to give or do something for God if the request was fulfilled. The Old Testament’s legal materials contain rules about vow making (Leviticus 22, 27; Numbers 30), and the narratives include stories about people who made vows.

Vows to God were a serious matter: if one made a votive promise and the request was fulfilled, the petitioner was obligated to fulfill the vow. In our text, a desperate woman named Hannah vowed that if God would give her a son, she would give the child back to God (1 Sam. 1:11). As hard as it was, after Samuel was weaned, she took him to Shiloh to serve in the temple (1 Sam. 1:24-28).

A warrior named Jephthah, seeking to become Israel’s leader, vowed that if God would grant him victory in war over the Ammonites, he would sacrifice whatever came out the door of his house upon his return. He may have been hoping it would be an animal, as two-story houses in which animals were kept on the ground floor were common in those days. Unfortunately, it was Jephthah’s only daughter who came out to greet him, singing and dancing for joy at his victory. Jephthah immediately regretted his rash vow, but felt compelled to fulfill it, even at the cost of his daughter’s life (Judg. 11:30-40).

While making their way through the wilderness, the people of Israel vowed that if God would give them victory against the Canaanite king of Arad, they would destroy all the plunder as a way of giving it to God rather than keeping it for themselves (Num. 21:1-3).

Votive promises did not have to be so severe. Jacob vowed that if God would protect and provide for him, he would worship and pay tithes to Yahweh (Gen. 28:10-22). Absalom claimed to have vowed that if God would allow him to return to Jerusalem from his exile in Geshur, he would go to Hebron and worship (2 Sam. 15:1-8). Later, some people made vows to become Nazirites for a specified period (Numbers 6).

Faithful Families—Elkanah and Hannah are prime examples of a couple who served God together. As individuals, they had their own spiritual pilgrimages to follow, making their own vows and keeping their personal promises to God. Yet, as a couple they also supported each other’s spiritual path so that their worship and service to God were shared experiences.

We all learn that it is easier to make promises to God than to keep them. We don’t call them “vows,” but may sometimes pray in the form of an Old Testament vow: “Oh Lord, if you will only do such and such for me, I promise to do such and such for you.” But such promises are easily forgotten when the crisis is over and normalcy reigns.

Digging Deeper *continued*

This story offers an impressive challenge to any who would make promises to God. What pledge could be more difficult to keep than giving up a long-awaited and only child? But Hannah did, and her husband supported her. May we also be as faithful and encouraging.

Singing Women—Most biblical psalms are attributed to men, but there was also a tradition of women who sang praises to God. The Song of Miriam in Exod. 15:21 may be an early form of the Song of Moses, which precedes it in the text (Exod. 15:1-18), and has been regarded as perhaps the oldest bit of poetry preserved in Scripture. The “Song of Deborah” (Judges 5) celebrates the victory of a remarkable woman who led Israel against the Canaanite general Sisera. It is different in style, but similar in theme to the Song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2:1-10). In the New Testament, the Song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55) echoes similar themes: God is able to reverse the fortunes of the poor and oppressed, leading them to experience unexpected blessings.

Hebrew Poetry—Hebrew poetry differs from typical English poetry (other than free verse) in that it has a rhythm of sense rather than rhyme, and meter as English readers know it is rare. Hebrew poetry most commonly consists of a series of couplets in which the second line repeats, expands, or reverses the thought of the first line. Occasionally, as in 1 Sam 2:2, the same pattern is found in a triplet, or sequence of three lines. This repetition of thought is called parallelism, and the relationship of the second line to the first determines whether it is called synonymous (repeats the same thought), antithetic (reverses the thought), or synthetic (expands the thought) parallelism. Like the repetitive chorus of a modern hymn, the constant reiteration of thought adds emphasis to the poet’s point of view.

Structure—As we look at Hannah’s song thematically, we can recognize three strophes: vv. 1-3 (praise for God who gives victory and knows all), vv. 4-8 (praise for God who reverses the fortunes of the oppressed), and vv. 9-10 (praise for God who protects the people and empowers the chosen king).

Poetically, the structure is more complicated and scholars view it in different ways, but that need not concern us here.

Sheol—Like their neighbors in the ancient world, the Hebrews imagined a three-story universe in which the “world of the dead” was located in a great cavern deep in the surface of the earth, between the pillars that supported the earth’s surface. Sheol was not equivalent to the later concept of hell: in Hebrew thought, Sheol was not necessarily a place of punishment, but simply the natural destination of all the dead, whether good or bad (Gen .37:35; 42:38; Job 7:9; 17:13; Ps. 6:5; Prov. 9:18; Eccl. 9:10; Ezek. 31:16-17).

Pillars of the earth—The noun underlying the translation “pillars” in v. 8b appears only here and in 1 Samuel 14:5. When words appear rarely, their meaning is less certain. The verbal root seems to suggest “something poured out” (such as a molten pillar) or possibly “something constrained” (like a narrow river). Some commentators believe this may refer to rivers of the underworld. Either translation stresses God’s power over all the earth.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Assertion, or appeal?—The last verse is usually translated as an assertion that God will strengthen and exalt the king, but could also be rendered as an appeal: “May he give strength to his king, and exalt the power of his anointed” (v. 10b). The preceding verses leave no doubt that Yahweh is both able and willing to strengthen the chosen king, but later stories make it clear that God’s blessings are predicated on the king’s obedience.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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Did Hannah sing Hannah's song?

Scholars have long proposed that the majestic "Song of Hannah" originated in a much later period, and was inserted into this story by the narrator as a way of praising God's faithfulness and foreshadowing the coming of kingship to Israel. Hannah's story is set at the end of the period of the Judges, when it was said "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg. 17:6; 21:25) – but what was right in their eyes was usually wrong in the eyes of God. Many hoped that a king to enforce the law would improve people's behavior, if not their motives.

We note first that the song doesn't really match Hannah's situation. The mention of enemies in v. 1 and v. 3 could be read as cryptic references to Hannah's rival Peninnah, but they seem much better suited as a reference to the nation, and the military imagery of v. 4 suggests many fierce enemies rather than one spiteful co-wife.

The song's repeated "reversal of fortunes" theme does speak of a barren woman who gave birth to seven children (v. 5b), but Hannah had six (Samuel, plus the five mentioned in 2:21). And, at the time the song was set, Samuel remained her only child.

As noted in the lesson, the poem anachronistically concludes with a prayer for God's anointed king, though Israel had no king until many years later when Samuel himself, as an old and respected leader with no clear successor, anointed Saul.

Readers who lean to the conservative end of the spectrum see no issue here, assuming that Hannah's reference to a king was prophetic. Still, the several incongruities of the psalm have led scholars who use critical tools of biblical research to postulate that it was inserted by a later editor in service to the theological agenda he was promoting.

Many have noted similarities between Hannah's song and Psalm 113, which begins with praise to God as Lord of the heavens and earth, but yet looks upon people with compassion, so as to reverse their fortunes:

"He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.
He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children.
Praise the LORD!" (Ps. 113:7-9).

In whatever context, the psalm functions as a clear proclamation of Yahweh as both sovereign and active in Israel's affairs. Just as Yahweh engineered Samuel's conception, Yahweh would also be involved in the birth of the monarchy. Samuel would grow up to prove faithful to his calling, and to challenge future leaders to be just as devoted to following God's way.