

**Russell Kelfer**

**Hannah:  
For This Child  
I Prayed**

**# 733-B**

**Series: God's Living Legends (Part 1)**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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# For This Child I Prayed

We would like to pray for patience,  
And suddenly just find  
(With no disturbing process)  
A patient kind of mind.

Why needless pain and suffering?  
(We'd circumvent such things.)  
What need have we for pressure,  
And all the hurt it brings?

If only you and I were God,  
We'd bypass every test.  
We'd have whate'er we asked for  
(We'd simply miss God's best.)

Yes, we would have our answers  
But that's the simple part,  
For we would miss the process  
*And never know God's heart.*

Isn't it great that His ways are higher than ours? Isn't it great that He often withholds from us *the very things we think we need* in order to create in us something we need much more? Isn't it great that He so often withholds physical things to accomplish the spiritual? Isn't it great that He delays the natural to create a need for the supernatural? Isn't it great that He often withholds from those He trusts the most, even those privileges seemingly afforded to those who don't know His name, so that by creating deeper dependence in us He can create a deeper trust and a richer testimony? Satan's offer to Eve was that she could become her own god. What a waste. That is like asking a newborn baby to direct traffic on Times Square. We don't need to *be* God. We need to *know* God; and in the process, we need to let God be God in our lives. Such is the message of today's Living Legend as her story is released from the pages of Scripture and relived for the purpose of reminding us just how perfect are the ways of God. Her name is Hannah. Her story is found in the opening moments of I Samuel. Our lesson is entitled, "Hannah: For This Child I Prayed". The Scripture will be I Samuel 1:1-28.

## I- WHY GOD WITHHOLDS

The setting of our story, chronologically, is at the end of the era of the judges, approximately 1,100 years before Christ. The setting of our story, geographically, is in Ramah, about 6 miles north of Jerusalem, and in Shiloh, about 15 miles farther north of Ramah. The setting of our story, historically, is that period of transition in Hebrew history from the era of the judges to the kingdom era. But the setting of our story, spiritually, is the key to its impact in our lives. Through the revealing of a life story of a very godly woman, God has designed this story to answer a question. The question is, “Why does God withhold from His children things they ought to, by man’s standards, automatically have?” Our story begins in verse 1 of chapter 1 of I Samuel.

Now there was a certain man of Ramathaimzophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite:

And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there.

And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions:

But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb.

(I Samuel 1:1-5)

Once again our story is set in a family backdrop. Poppa’s name is Elkanah, meaning “acquired by God”. Poppa had two Mommas. He had two wives, as did about 15 others in Scripture, including Abraham, Esau, Jacob, Gideon, David and Solomon. But it almost always led to trouble and it was expressly outlawed by the time the New Testament was written. Matthew 19, Mark 10, 1 Timothy 3, and Titus 1 will verify that. This passage simply confirms that polygamy, when it was allowed, was, at best, a source of heartache, contention and jealousy. In other words, it didn’t work.

Now the two wives in Elkanah’s household were Peninnah

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meaning “pearl” and Hannah meaning “grace or gracious one”. There is one basic problem that served as the key point of contention in this household. It was that Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. The reason for Hannah’s barrenness is clearly stated in verse 5, where it says that *The Lord had shut up her womb*. Now before we see how Hannah suffered for her barrenness, we see a geographical switch of 9 miles. The scene changes and we find Elkanah and his two wives in Shiloh where he was to offer his yearly sacrifice to the Lord. There it was customary for a man to offer peace offerings to Jehovah, pouring out the blood at the foot of the altar and burning the fat with fire and leaving the breast and right shoulder for the priest, taking the rest for himself and his family to eat at feast time. Elkanah gave a portion to Peninnah and each of her children. To Hannah, he gave a double portion, for he loved her very much. He was grieved, as well, over her barrenness. Elkanah was trying to compensate for a merciless barrage of ridicule that Hannah suffered continually at the hands of Peninnah, who, incidentally, is referred to in verse 6 as her enemy. Let’s look at it now,

And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb.

And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat.

Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?

(I Samuel 1:6-8)

So there you have Hannah’s heartache. There are at least four problems.

1- God had shut up her womb so that she could not conceive. This carried a lot of humiliation in her day.

2- God had allowed Elkanah’s other wife, a not so spiritual young lady, to spend a few days a year in the Ramah Hospital Maternity Ward. With every bundle of joy that Peninnah brought home, came a new bundle of depression for Hannah.

3- Hannah’s kind competitor in the baby derby turned out to be a poor winner. The humiliation would have been bad enough even if Peninnah had been a good sport, but instead she chose to appoint herself as Hannah’s not so heavenly sandpaper. She seemed to delight in parading her brood in front of Hannah,

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accompanied with taunts like, “Too bad you can’t have children, Hannah, look what the Lord has done for me.” You know the kind.

4- Hannah’s helpless hubby enters the picture with all the sensitivity of a rhinoceros. Instead of understanding her feelings and grieving with her, he gives her one more helping of feast food and says, “Where is your appetite? What are you crying for?” That is what a lot of us say when someone is hurting. Then comes this Macho Meathead response, “You’ve got me. What more could you ask for? I’m better than 10 sons.”

Aren’t we men sensitive creatures? We always reduce life down to facts and figures and take it personally when Mom is depressed. We are often more concerned with our own male egos than our wife’s real feelings. This woman was hurting badly. Year after year, she went childless, and year after year, Poppa’s other wife made fun of her. No wonder when she went to the temple to worship, she was about to explode.

### II- WHAT GOD DESIRES

Now you and I know what God was trying to do, but Hannah was too involved to be objective. Often, so are we when we are the object of God’s withholding grace. Again and again and again in Scripture, God chose out special people and withheld from them what the world considered *natural blessings*. In many cases, it was related to the birth of a child. At other times, the withholding was part of the natural process of obtaining food or water. Always, it was something the world took for granted. Always, God withheld it to get His children’s attention and to guarantee that glory would accrue only to Him. The greater the pressure, the greater the dependence. It was not that He wanted His children to be denied life’s natural blessings; it was that He rather wanted them to experience supernatural blessings by creating a need that only He could fill.

Maybe you have been there. You are looking at others, carrying a spirit of expectation that, as God’s child, you deserve at least what they have, naturally. You expect a super job to appear on the horizon, but nothing happens. You want a big family, but no children come. You are looking for financial freedom, but instead your transmission dies, your water heater refuses to, and a pipe in the front yard becomes an underground sprinkler. Or you expect your children to be at least as obedient as Karl Karnal’s

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who lives next door, but his kids snap to attention, and yours snap your patience. Or you believe God for a fruitful ministry but everything you do backfires. Or you expect good health and the doctor says, "About those x-rays..." Four things happen to you at such a time:

1- You begin to see that others have what you want, and you begin to desire the same thing in a healthy sort of way. Financial freedom. A happy family. A successful ministry. Good job. Good health. But God has withheld one of those blessings from you. The shut-off valve of heaven seems closed. Others are bathing in blessings, but to you, the heavens are silent.

2- Your desire turns to dependence, and suddenly you realize that everyone else may be getting married or having children or getting jobs. If what is going to happen to you is what you desire, God is going to have to do it. So you recognize the source of your blessings, and you toss up a prayer to God and look casually over your shoulder for the answer.

3- Time passes, and eventually your desire, which turned to dependence, turns to desperation. The circumstances get worse and you cry out to God in anguish. You are pleading before God for things you once took for granted. Maybe it is a child, a job, a wife, a husband. God now has your undivided attention.

4- Suddenly, your desperation turns to a decision. It may be a deeper level of commitment or a yielding of an area of besetting sins or a response to an unanswered call or a vow of consecration in an area of your life. You are at a place, spiritually, you would have never reached if God hadn't closed the shut off valve of your blessings and caused your desire to turn into dependence, your dependence into desperation, and finally, your desperation to a time of decision. At this point, the child, the job, the finances, or the marriage are no longer the issue. *The will of God is the issue.* Now you don't even want the child, unless God does. You don't even want the job, unless God does. He may miraculously give you what you desired, or better still, just give you more of Himself instead. The key is that now He has your undivided attention and is in the process of changing your life by withholding from your life blessings that you took for granted.

So why God withholds from us becomes obvious. It is to get our attention. What God desires when He does get our attention becomes obvious as well. *He desires that we learn how to pray.*

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Now back to Hannah in verse 9,

So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD.

And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore.

And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth.

Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken.

And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee.

And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.

Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.

And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.

(I Samuel 1:9-18)

Hannah had seen herself barren, while others, even Peninnah, had children. Her desire had turned to dependence. She realized that the Lord had shut up her womb, therefore it wasn't up to her. If she was to have a child, God was going to have to intervene. Now her dependence turned to desperation. She entered the temple where Eli, the priest, was seated and began to pour her heart out to God. I don't mean the casual, "Oh, by the way, Lord, I sure would like a child," a prayer not unlike what many of us often pray. She was so moved that she cried and prayed and prayed and cried. The words wouldn't even come out. She just trusted God to know her heart and to heed the anguish of her soul. So desperately did she pray, that Eli



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mistook her grief for drunkenness. He proceeded to interrupt her prayers and give her a lecture on temperance. Here is another sensitive spiritual leader in her life.

Have you ever cared enough to pray like that? I'm not talking about emotional fervor, but about genuine grief. I'm talking about a real anguish of soul about something that you believe to be the will of God. Hannah's desperation led her to a decision. She realized that children really don't belong to parents anyway. Children belong to God. There is the reason God shut her womb. Suddenly He counted her worthy to learn a deeper, spiritual truth. Perhaps that is why God has counted you worthy and withheld from you something which you count to be a natural blessing. He has some deeper spiritual truth for you that cannot be learned under a torrent of blessings, but only from the parched, dry longing that comes from having done without. Only this kind of circumstance can create that kind of appetite.

Hannah's decision was this: "Lord, if You choose to give me a son, I will give him back to You for as long as he lives. I mean *really* give him back to You, Lord. I will give him up, give him over to You. You can do with him as you choose." When she prayed like that, Eli said to her, "Go in peace and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition." So she went her way and ate. Her countenance was no more sad. Did you get that? *She still didn't have a child, but now she didn't have a burden either.* The grief was gone, along with the desperation. She and God had done business. Now it was God's baby. He could send it or not send it as He chose. It could be healthy or not healthy as He chose. It could be destined for greatness or bent toward rebellion; it was God's child and it wasn't Hannah's problem anymore. So Hannah wasn't sad anymore. *Hannah had learned how to pray.* If Hannah had been having babies like everyone else, she would have taken babies for granted. But Hannah was barren, *so Hannah learned to pray.*

That is when most of us learn to pray. When the heavens are silent and the shut-off valve of God's blessings is closed, our dependence turns to desperation. Jesus knew how to pray like that. Watch Him in the garden of Gethsemane. We read in John 18, that He went to the garden, where He often went. Jesus was no stranger to the garden. He prayed more often and with more power than any other person who had ever lived, because He always prayed rightly. Jesus didn't just hand the Father an IBM card of His needs and, in an emotionless transaction of the

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heavenly supermarket of eternity, receive His needs. Listen to Luke 22, and learn how Jesus prayed. This is from the Wuest translation:

And having gone out, He proceeded according to His custom to the Mount of Olivet and the disciples followed with Him

And having come to the place, He said to them, "Keep continually praying that you will not enter the place where testing will be so severe that it will lead to solicitation to do evil under which you will fall."

And He Himself tore Himself away from them to a distance of about a stone's throw, and having fallen upon His knees, He was praying saying,

"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not My desire, but yours let it keep on being done."

And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him.

And having entered a state of severe mental and emotional struggle to the point of agony, He was praying more earnestly. His perspiration became like great drops of blood [by reason of the fact that His blood burst through the ruptured walls of the capillaries. The latter caused by His agony, coloring His perspiration and enlarging the drops] continually falling down upon the ground.

(Luke 22:39-44 Wuest)

### III. WHEN GOD RESPONDS

Now you and I may never pray until drops of blood pour from our brow. But we can learn to pray with that kind of grief, with that kind of dependence, with that kind of desperation, with that kind of decision, *nevertheless, Thy will be done*. We can learn to pray like that. When we do, God sends angels to strengthen us. Hannah learned to pray like that. God was waiting for Hannah to learn His heart. Now He could give her that child and it wouldn't be hers, it would be His. Let's look,

And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

(I Samuel 1:11)

And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to

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Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her.

Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD.

And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the LORD the yearly sacrifice, and his vow.

But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever.

And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the LORD establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him.

And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young.

And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.

And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD.

For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him:

Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there. (I Samuel 1:19-28)

Hannah had prayed in desperation, “Lord, if You give me a child I will give him back to You.” One of those “foxhole” promises? No, Hannah acknowledged the commitment. She made a vow and she kept her vow. Ecclesiastes chapter 5 is where you find our reminder verse. Many of you remember it,

When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.

Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. (Ecclesiastes 5:4,5)

God says, “I don’t take vows lightly and neither should you.” Does there race through your mind any vows you have made to God in a moment of desperation which, when the prayer was answered, you allowed to slip into the back closet of your mind

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with an, “Oh, well, God understands I really didn’t mean it”? Oh, beloved, God understands. He may have created that crisis to bring you to that stage of desperation and caused you to make that vow to change your life. Why is it that we always expect God to keep His promises and assume He doesn’t expect us to keep ours? Hannah acknowledged her vow and she acknowledged that it was a miracle of God. Let’s look again at verse 27,

For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my  
petition which I asked of Him. (I Samuel 1:27)

Have you ever prayed for a miracle and then spent the next year rationalizing how it might have happened anyway? That is foolish. God created a need so that you would pray. You prayed so that God would answer. God answered so that you would give Him the glory. Just accept the miracle as from God. “For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of Him.” Period. For this job I prayed, and the Lord gave me what I asked for. Period. For this marriage I prayed, and the Lord answered my prayer. For this ministry I prayed, and the Lord gave me this ministry. For this soul I prayed, and the Lord touched his heart. *Give God the glory.*

Only when you give God the glory does His purpose come full circle. He created a need so that you would pray. He wanted you to pray so that He could answer. He wanted to answer so that you would give Him the glory. Don’t forget the final step and short-circuit the glory cycle by coming one step short of its goal.

Hannah acknowledged her vow and acknowledged that the miracle came from God. Lastly, she acknowledged that ownership of this child was now in the hands of God. “For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of Him, therefore also I have given him back to the Lord as long as he lives, he shall belong to the Lord.” They all paused then and worshipped the Lord.

If you are a parent and are struggling, as we all do, with the day-to-day anxieties of parenthood, maybe this is what is wrong. Give that child back to his rightful owner maybe for the first time or maybe for the four-hundredth time. You are still his teacher. You are still his example. You are still his hand of correction. Do what you have been called to do, but the results are not up to you. Love them with a love that is real, but don’t worry about them. You may say, “That is easy for you to say.” Don’t worry about how they will turn out. You say, “What basis

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do you have for a statement like that?” Well, let’s try Philippians 4:6 for starters.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4:6,7 NIV)

Verse 6 doesn’t say to be anxious for a few things, it says nothing. The result is that the peace of God, which we can’t even understand, will be given to us. Now I think that is a pretty good trade, don’t you? So the greater the problems, the more we pray. The more we pray, the less we ought to worry. Which of us by worrying can add one inch to our height or one day to our lives? When we are free from worry, we are free to really love those children unconditionally.

Hannah took little Samuel when he was only a toddler and left him at the temple. She *left* him. Once a year, she made a coat and went to see him. Mothers, can you relate to that? *Once a year*, she left him in custody of a man whose utter failure to discipline his own children had caused grief both to God and to his own people. But Hannah had no basis for worry. God closed her womb to make her pray. He made her pray so that He could give her Samuel. He gave her Samuel so that she could give him back to Him. So Samuel was God’s responsibility. It was her responsibility to give him up and not take him back. It wasn’t easy to go back there each year and to come back home without him. It would have been easy to say, “Lord, it has been a good 6 years and I think that takes care of that.” Or, “Lord, only 8 years, that is what I really meant. Time is up, Lord.” No, God meant as long as he lived and so did Hannah.

Some of us need to go home and draw up another certificate of ownership for each of our children. We need to make an altar and lay it down before Him. Every time we start to worry or interfere with what God is trying to do in their lives, we ought to reread that certificate and just begin to pray. You may ask, “What would I write on a certificate like that?” Simple, let Hannah write it for you. She would write this:

*For this child, Johnny, I prayed.*

*The Lord has given me the petition which I have asked of Him. Therefore, I give him back to the Lord. As long as he*

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*lives, he belongs to the Lord. Therefore, I do worship the Lord now.*

*Signed, Mom and Dad.*

You may need to give your marriage back the same way. You may need to give your job back the same way. You may need to give your finances back. You may need to give your ministry back. The issue in question may be your very walk with Christ. You may have prayed that, at whatever the cost, you wanted to be His special child. Now God, perhaps through great pain, has taken you at your word and now He has given you a life of faith. You say, "For this life I prayed." Now, beloved, give it back to Him for Him to live it as He sees fit for all your days. You won't stop loving. You won't stop laboring. You won't stop saving. You won't stop ministering. But there will be a whole new freedom because it won't be your child or your job or your money or your ministry or even your life, but God's. You will be able to say with Hannah,

FOR THIS CHILD I PRAYED

For this very child I prayed  
And God has heard my prayer.  
For He had closed my womb in love,  
And filled me with despair.  
In anguish, I cried out to Him,  
"Lord, this is what I'll do:  
If you'll but give a child to me,  
I'll give him back to you.  
"And oh, dear Lord, You answered me  
The child is mine for now,  
But now the haunting question is,  
Will I still keep that vow?"  
Hannah, for a child did pray,  
And she gave God her word;  
So when the child was still a babe  
She gave him to the Lord.  
"For this child I prayed," you say  
Beloved, give God praise.  
Then give your children back to Him  
For all their life-long days.

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And when you're tempted in the night  
To fear the path they've trod  
Ask yourself, "What right have I?  
That child belongs to God."

"For this wife I prayed," you say  
The principle's the same,  
Though your wife is yours to love,  
She bears the Master's name.

So do not fear or fret for her,  
That's not the task of man;  
God's the one who transforms lives  
The only one who can.

"For this job I prayed," you say  
Once again, it's true,  
Labor as unto the Lord;  
It's up to God, not you.

"For this Christ-like life I prayed,"  
Beloved, here's the key  
God gave you what you asked for:  
A life of victory.

Now give it back to Him to live;  
Just let Him have His way,  
And He will give you joy and peace  
Day after day after day.

### For Focus and Application

1- Have you ever been in a situation like Hannah's, where your sister or best friend or someone else in your life seemed to have an ungodly perspective, but got everything she or he wanted? What was your response?

2- Is there something that God has seemingly withheld from you during your life in order to get your attention? Is it something other people seemed to get with no apparent problem? A nice house. Children. Friendships. A good job. That "big break". Does there always seem to be someone around you who gets what you want and seems to take it for granted? Why do you think that is?

3- Why does God withhold things from those He loves?

4- What Scriptural basis do you find for God's ultimate control of the womb? Why do God's precious ones often struggle to have children, when others have them easily?

## The Secret of a Powerful Prayer

5- Elkanah felt helpless. What would you have said, had Hannah been your wife? What would you have wanted him to say, had you been Hannah?

6- Look at the progression that follows when God withholds things we want.

- a- We desire what others have in a healthy way.
- b- The desire turns to dependence, when we realize only God can provide it.
- c- Eventually, the dependence turns to desperation. You cry out to God in anguish of soul.
- d- Finally, the desperation turns to decision. We give up and give the matter to a sovereign God who knows best. At that point, *whatever He does, is wonderful.*
- e- Have you ever experienced that progression in your life? What would you have missed had God given you what you wanted in the first place? Why do we tend to forget that lesson?

7- God wanted to teach Hannah how to pray. She knew the basics of prayer. She knew the theological ramifications of prayer. Now she needed to learn, experientially, how to enter one of life's Gethsemanes and pray until her broken heart belonged to God. Has that ever happened to you? What did it do to your concept of prayer? Have you let that moment slip your mind? Did you remember to go back *and give God all the glory?*

8- Hannah's burden was lifted long before she had a child. Why was that? At what point did she trade the anxiety for peace? What verse promises that?

9- Have you ever really given your children to God? What do you think that means? Have you left them there? Hannah had to leave her son there every year, year after year. Why not do that again today. And once you have, do something as a remembrance so that when Satan tries to convince you to take them back, you can pray: "For this child I prayed, and the Lord has given me my petition. I, therefore, gave him or her back to God for as long as I live."

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