



≈≈≈ I SURRENDER ≈≈≈

MY COMFORT

ZONE

Key Verses: “Present your bodies *a living sacrifice*, holy, acceptable unto God.” (*emphasis mine*) Romans 12:1b

“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. ... For when I am weak, then am I strong.”

2 Corinthians 12:9-10:

A comfort zone is a place where we know what to expect, have a measure of control over the events, and things are as we like. Often God wants to grow, stretch, and refine us (Job 23:10). This process is often uncomfortable, unwanted, and unwelcome. Are we willing to be obedient when God tugs at our heart or opens the door?

Hannah

In 1 Samuel 1 and 2 we meet Hannah, a lady who lived during a period of moral decline and spiritual rebellion. Her husband, Elkanah, chose to marry two women though that was not God’s plan for marriage. Yet at the time of sacrifices he gave “unto Hannah a worthy portion” (verse 5).

Hannah means “grace” which is ironic since she was childless and suffered disgrace in the Jewish culture. Her husband was a Kohathite, the most honorable house of the tribe of Levi. In seeking to set the example for his family and to have a devout household, he participated in the solemn feasts in Shiloh. Shiloh, a house of prayer, was the place where God had promised to meet His people.

Hannah was definitely not in a comfort zone. She was childless while the second wife, Peninnah, bore many children. In 1:6, we learn that Peninnah provoked Hannah grievously. Why? “The Lord had shut up her womb.”

Did Peninnah provoke Hannah more during the time of sacrifices? Were they together more? In closer quarters? Was there a greater audience to increase the hurt and humiliation? We do not know, but verse 7 states, “She [Peninnah] provoked her [Hannah]; therefore she wept, and did not eat.”

Elkanah asked Hannah if he was not worth more to her than 10 sons (verse 8). At Elkanah’s death, Hannah would be reduced to beggary with no son to support her. Yet, Hannah accepted her husband’s gentle rebuke, and did not become bitter or hardened. She rose, ate, and went to pray.

Hannah's intense, specific prayer mingled with her tears. Her lips moved silently. Eli misread the situation. Due to the conditions in Israel at that time, he assumed Hannah was drunk. Respectfully, Hannah told Eli she had "poured out [her] soul before the Lord" (verse 15).

Verse 11 cites the specific prayer request and Hannah's vow. She asks for a man-child whom she would give back to the Lord for the rest of his life. This son would be a Levite by birth and a Nazarite by her vow.

Eli recognized Hannah's genuineness and authenticity. He told her to go in peace, that God would answer her prayer (verse 17). Can you imagine how this lifted Hannah's downtrodden spirit?

Upon returning home, "the Lord remembered her" (verse 19). Hannah conceived and gave birth to Samuel. She chose his name because she had "asked him of the Lord" (verse 20). Every time Samuel's name was spoken, it would be a reminder that his mom had agonized in prayer asking God for him.

But do you remember Hannah's promise? Verse 11 states; "I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life." Once weaned, she took Samuel to Shiloh (verse 24). Then in 2:19 we read that Hannah "made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year." She knew and accepted God's special plan for this son though it would not be easy for her.

Reflective Questions

Do you think Elkanah understood the depth of Hannah's agony? Explain.

How aware was Elkanah of Peninnah's taunts and ridicule?

Can you imagine the myriad of emotions Hannah experienced on the trip to Shiloh when she would leave Samuel? What about on the trip home without him?

For what relationship, problem, or situation are you agonizing in prayer? How will you handle God's answer be it yes, no, or wait?

The Widow With a Pot of Oil

This unnamed lady is found in 2 Kings 4:1-7. She had been married to one of the sons of the prophets and was the mother of at least two boys. She tells Elisha, "thou knowest that thy servant did fear the Lord" (verse 1). He would have kept his integrity during a period of apostasy. He would have been one of the 7000 that did not bow a knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18).

When her husband died, he owed more than he (or she) could pay. It would be assumed these were honest debts since they feared the Lord. Now, the creditor is coming to take her sons who are assets. Exodus 21:2 states this

would have been for at least six years. She was out of her comfort zone, first as a widow, and then possibly becoming childless.

She turns to Elisha in her time of distress and need. He asks her a simple question in verse 2. "What shall I do for thee? Tell me, what hast thou in the house?" She told him she only had a pot of oil. His direction is straightforward. "Go, borrow thee vesselsnot a few"(verse 3). Elisha wanted her to make the best of what she had. She would have to exercise her own faith by being obedient.

This widow was obedient and followed Elisha's specific instructions. After the borrowed vessels were collected, she and her sons entered the house and shut the door. She begins pouring her oil

into the other vessels. Her sons bring the empty vessels to her and then set them aside when full. At one point, she asks for another vessel and her son tells her there are none. Notice the oil did not multiply until she began pouring.

She reports to Elisha that she has done what he asked. His response is recorded in verse 7, "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest." God through Elisha did not just relieve the immediate crisis and stress. The plan allowed her to sell the oil to pay the creditor, but it also provided income for her family. She would keep her family together and her boys would be able to find jobs

and support the family.

This miracle was not for public show. Remember the closed door. What a spiritual experience for this widow and her sons. She would have understood the principle of paying one's debt (Luke 20:24-25). She would have known about debtor's prison and slavery (Leviticus 25:39-40; Matthew 18:21-35). God supplied her needs (Philippians 4:19; Matthew 6:25-34).

We have no more details about this widow's life. I can just imagine she was generous and shared with others who struggled because God met her in her "uncomfortable place." May we be His hands and feet in our sphere of influence.

Reflective Questions

Does God care about your financial needs?

Does God work in the details of our lives? Can you share a personal example?

When God supplies our needs, does that include our wants? Is there a difference?

How should God's supply of our needs affect our generosity?

Who has benefitted because of God's goodness to you?

Elizabeth

Luke 1 tells her story. She was the wife of Zechariah, the priest. She was barren which was considered to be a reproach from God in the Jewish culture. Yet she was righteous and walked blamelessly before the Lord though she had no child.

Can you imagine her angst? Her husband was a priest yet she was barren? Would you or I have wallowed in self-pity? Chosen not to serve the Lord? What an example Elizabeth leaves for us.

Luke 1:5-23 tells us of Zechariah's experience. He was a priest in the division of Abijah, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron. Each of the 24 divisions served one week twice a year. Lots were cast to determine who would burn the incense, a once in a lifetime experience. This particular week the lot fell on Zechariah.

He had been in the temple

for quite awhile (verse 10). The multitude was outside waiting and praying while listening for the bells on the hem of his garment. Little did they know what was happening inside.

While Zechariah was performing his duties, an angel appeared to him telling him his prayer had been heard. "Thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John" (verse 13). We can assume from this passage that Zechariah and Elisabeth had prayed much for this need. The angel gave them specific instructions regarding John's life and ministry (verses 15-17).

Though a priest, Zechariah responded with doubt. The consequence was muteness. He would not speak until these words were fulfilled. Zechariah finishes his duties inside the Temple and exits. He is not able to speak the Aaronic blessing but gestures to the people. Verse 22 tells us they

realized he had seen a vision.

Elisabeth was old and past her childbearing years. Imagine her excitement and thanksgiving as her “reproach” is removed. Verse 24 tells us Elisabeth “hid herself for five months.” She may have wanted her pregnancy to progress before she showed herself to her relatives and neighbors. She probably utilized this time in reflection and praise to the God who had seen her situation and moved in a miraculous way.

Fast forward to the appointed day. This baby boy is born and circumcised on the eighth day.

As was the custom, the baby was named on this day. Elisabeth said his name would be John. The neighbors and relatives argued with her. Zechariah asked for a tablet and wrote, “His name is John” (verse 63), and his tongue was loosed and he praised God.

Imagine the joy of moving from the reproach of barrenness to being the mother of John, the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah (verse 17). Oh, the blessing of being obedient and walking blamelessly, even in a very uncomfortable place.

Reflective Questions

Wonder if Elisabeth was in the multitude? If so, can you imagine the questions flooding her mind? If she was not, imagine the conversations that occurred when Zechariah got home.

Do you think Elisabeth would have questioned her ability to raise such a young man? Did she and Zechariah live to see him grown? We don't have the details. Do you think there was “discomfort” in the parenting stage as well as the reproach stage of Elisabeth's life?

What is your uncomfortable place?

May each of us find our comfort “under His wings” (Psalm 91:4). May we learn to say with Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). May we pour out our souls before the Lord and then live lives that honor and glorify Him!

About the Writer: Elizabeth Hodges is Executive Director of Women Nationally Active for Christ. She seeks to connect women through the Word and network women’s groups in order to accomplish greater goals toward fulfilling the Great Commission. Contact her at elizabeth@nafwb.org or through Facebook or Twitter.