

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Bible Prayers: Praying Old Testament Believers - Hannah, Elijah and Daniel

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today*. The title of our talk is "Praying Old Testament Believers". This is the last in the series "Bible Prayers".

This morning I feel quite privileged to be able to give a talk on three great Old Testament characters, Hannah, Elijah and Daniel, three very godly people who were marked by prayer and used by God in remarkable ways. Because of time, we will have to be short and to the point on each character. However, I suggest that you take time to read their life stories.

Prayer. Well the question is often asked: Why do we need to pray when God knows our thoughts already? Prayer is the only way that we can speak to God and by reading the Bible God speaks to us. So if we did not pray it would be like listening to someone but never speaking to them. From the very beginning, God came down to the Garden of Eden regularly to speak with Adam, to have a relationship with him (Genesis 2:15-17). To have a proper relationship between two people there needs to be a two way dialogue. God wants to hear our thoughts our desires and our concerns because He loves us.

Prayer is something that is really important to a Christian; prayer gives us the power in our lives daily to serve God and to be of use for Him. How often do we fail to pray regularly? It is often the first thing we drop when we are busy or taken up with other things in life. But how often when we have problems we suddenly fall to our knees, because we feel helpless and really need God to help us.

So often we go along our daily lives in self confidence with no thought of committing our day to God. We need to tell God every day that we rely and trust on Him. We also need to thank and praise God; in fact, we should begin our prayers in thanksgiving as we have so much to thank God for.

Praying regularly is a real challenge to me and I am sure there are listeners today that have the same problem. On the other hand, there are men and women today who have real devoted prayer lives. James 5:16 reads, "*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*" Oh, that these words could be true of me: "*the effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much*"! As we continue reading James 5:17-18, James reminds us of Elijah: "*Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.*" The interesting thing here was that God had already told Elijah He would send drought then rain, but Elijah still had to pray for it to happen.

In looking for answers to prayer, we notice that in all the three characters we are considering that after praying specifically for something there was a period before their prayers were answered. Prayers are very rarely answered immediately; sometimes God has to prepare us for the answer that is coming. I trust that today, as we consider Hannah, Elijah and Daniel, you may be encouraged to pray more and have the patience to wait for God's answer.

Hannah

The story of Hannah is found in 1 Samuel 1:1-2:11. Her name is only mentioned in eleven verses of the Bible but she is such a well known character. Hannah was a real woman of faith; she was married to Elkanah and they had no children (1 Samuel 1:2). Elkanah loved Hannah very, very much and was concerned because Hannah became very depressed (1 Samuel 1:5) because she was unable to have children (1 Samuel 1:5); this really upset her. It did not help that Peninah who was Elkanah's other wife had children (1 Samuel 1:4). Peninah was very cruel to Hannah and goaded her at every opportunity (1 Samuel 1:6-7). The family were very faithful and every year they made the journey to Shiloh to sacrifice and to worship God as they were required to do (1 Samuel 1:7). Hannah on one occasion in Shiloh was provoked so much she was reduced to tears and refused to eat (1 Samuel 1:7-9). Hannah came before Eli the priest and she prayed to the LORD (1 Samuel 1:9-13). It is interesting to note that Eli never heard her prayer (1 Samuel 1:12-13); he saw her lips moving but never heard any words. He actually thought she was drunk! (1 Samuel 1:14) Hannah's prayer was of a very personal nature; it was about something that was affecting her and

her family. Hannah's attitude in coming to pray was maybe not the best as she came in "*bitterness of spirit*" (See Genesis 26:35). Hannah's prayer was for a son; this was her heart's desire (1 Samuel 1:11). She vowed if the LORD gave her a son she would give him back to the LORD after he was weaned (1 Samuel 1:11). Hannah poured out her soul before the LORD; this was a desperate cry from a woman who was emptying her thoughts and desires into the LORD'S hand. When Hannah had finished praying, Eli tells her that her prayer would be answered (1 Samuel 1:17). Hannah then believed that the LORD would give her a son and her attitude changed dramatically. Not long afterwards, Hannah did have a son and she called him Samuel (1 Samuel 1:19-20). Hannah loved Samuel so much but the day came when Hannah handed Samuel over to Eli so he could serve the LORD in the temple (1 Samuel 1:24-28). Hannah was faithful to God and kept her vow. Samuel became God's representative in Israel, a great prophet who anointed King David (1 Samuel 16:1-13). God blessed Hannah even more by giving her more children (1 Samuel 2:21).

Hannah, in acknowledgment of God's answer to her prayer, prays a wonderful prayer of thanksgiving and worship (1 Samuel 2:1-10). Her prayer is quite similar to the prayer of Mary, see Luke 1:46-55. Hannah's heart rejoiced and thanksgiving and praise flowed from her lips. She acknowledged the greatness of God; she speaks of how God had helped her overcome her adversaries. Hannah was in the full appreciation of Romans 8:31: "*What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*" This is how prayer works: Hannah prayed, God heard, God answered and acted, Hannah gave thanks and worshipped. You might argue that God would have done what He did without the prayers of Hannah, maybe so. But God requires us to pray, to call upon Him, to express our thoughts so He can answer our prayers. This sometimes takes time. Isn't it lovely when our children ask for our help or advice and, after receiving this, they say thank you. We, of course, are more than happy to help them in any way. But we always need to be honest and straight with them, not always just telling them the things they want to hear. Not always giving them things when they want them. Answers to prayer are sometimes like this, not always what we want to hear and when we want them.

Elijah

When we come to Elijah his prayers were not so much of a personal nature but more out of a concern for the people of Israel. We pick up the story in 1 Kings 17. Elijah was God's man, God's voice, God's representative at this time in Israel. He was a man who had great faith and one in whom God displayed great things. But like you and me he was overcome with feelings of helplessness, loneliness, fear and depression. King Ahab ruled and his wife Jezebel and her evil prophets of Baal had the ear of the people (1 Kings 16:29-34). These were dark days in Israel as the people had turned their back on God and were following idols. God is patient and lets things go on for so long, then He acts. God causes a drought in Israel to get the attention of the king and the people. Elijah, in fear and trembling, had the task of telling King Ahab what God was going to do (1 Kings 17:1). Elijah then ran for his life; there was a bounty on his head and he was afraid he would be killed (1 Kings 17:2-4). God cared for Elijah the same way He cares for you and me although we don't always see it that way, usually because of the circumstances we are in at the time. The ravens fed him morning and night and he drank water from the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:5-6). God in His wisdom was preparing Elijah so he was ready to execute the plan God had to bring His people Israel back to Himself. I think God used the time when Elijah was on his own at the brook to great effect. Elijah was prepared and was given strength, enough strength for the challenges ahead.

We next read of Elijah praying when he was faced with a death scene (1 Kings 17:17-24). He had called at a house where a widow lived with her only son who had just died (1 Kings 17:19). Elijah cried unto the LORD for the son to live again (1 Kings 17:20-21). Elijah's prayer was answered (1 Kings 17:22-23) and because of this the widow recognised that he was a true man of God (1 Kings 17:24). God then speaks with Elijah directly instructing him what he had to do next (1 Kings 18:1). Elijah had to challenge the prophets of Baal to prove the greatness of the only true and living God (1 Kings 18:20-29). The challenge was to light a sacrifice by calling down fire from heaven. The prophets of Baal, of course, could not do this and Elijah heaped coals on their heads by pouring water over the sacrifice (1 Kings 18:33-35), then praying to God to light the fire. God answered his prayer and the prophets of Baal were shamed and the people again turned to God, the true and only God of Israel (1 Kings 18:39).

Elijah killed all the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:40) but, when Jezebel heard this, she sent out people to find Elijah and kill him (1 Kings 19:1-2). In 1 Kings 19 we read of Elijah in the wilderness, weary with his life, feeling so low that he prays to God that he would die (1 Kings 19:4). God in His mercy sends an angel to strengthen Elijah and gives him strength for the journey ahead (1 Kings 19:5-8). Elijah finds a cave to hide in and God asks him what he is up to. Elijah talks to the LORD (1 Kings 19:9-18). That is what prayer is all about, just simply talking to the LORD, spending time in His presence. The more we talk to God the better we get to know and understand Him. Elijah had a real heart for the people of Israel; he knew they had turned their back on God and he expresses this to Him (1 Kings 19:14). But Elijah was also feeling sorry for himself, just like we do at times. He thought that he was the only one standing up for God in Israel amongst all the idolatry (1 Kings 19:14). God put him firmly in his place by telling him that He had seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to the idol Baal (1 Kings 19:18). God also had another man ready called Elisha who would take on the role Elijah had been fulfilling for God in Israel (1 Kings 19:19-21). Elijah had to realise that God was in control and that He would always have a remnant. A remnant is a small number of faithful people who

would be a witness for Him. Elijah continued listening and talking with God throughout the rest of his life, performing more great acts in the power of God.

Daniel

When we come to Daniel we see a man of prayer. Daniel was a young man who was a captive in the land of Babylon, a foreign land (Daniel 1:3-4); so not great circumstances to be in. But even in the most extreme circumstances he faithfully got on his knees and prayed to God (Daniel 6:10). His heart was set and his mind made up that he would continue to have a relationship with God, no matter the consequences. Babylon was a place of terrible idolatry and it would have been easier for him to give up than to set himself apart for God. Daniel had three friends who also shared Daniel's passion to set themselves apart for God (Daniel 3:1-30). I am sure that when Daniel and his three friends took this stand for God they did it prayerfully together. It is a good thing that believers of the same mind pray together.

Daniel also had his own individual prayer life as we read in Daniel 6:10: *"Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."*

It was Daniel's prayer life that gave him the power, the strength and the belief that God would always look after him, even in the most extreme circumstances. A personal prayer life is essential as we serve God. The decree went out in Babylon that the only person you could pray to or worship was the king (Daniel 6:1-9). Of course, this was totally against Daniel's beliefs, so even when the decree was signed, Daniel continued openly without fear or shame to pray to God three times every day (Daniel 6:10).

The consequences of doing this and getting caught was to be thrown into the den of lions (Daniel 6:13-17). Daniel was caught but God was in control of the situation and no lion was allowed to harm him (Daniel 6:18-21). God's protection over His servants holds no bounds! God uses Daniel a man, who had built up a good reputation in Babylon, as a witness to His power and righteousness.

What can we learn?

So what can we learn from these Old Testament believer's prayer lives?

First of all, we must pray regularly. God loves to hear our voice, even the little things that concern us in life, things that we would class as not worth bringing to God. Anything at all that concerns us, God is interested in. The Bible tells us this. 1 Peter 5:7 reads: *"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."* God also desires our worship, our praise and our thanksgiving. Prayer shows our constant need and dependence upon a loving God who is also our Father.

From Hannah, we see that we can take deep personal problems to God. We also see that no matter what other people try and do to us, God is in control. He will lift us out of the circumstances that we are in. He will do this in His time and in His way, of course. We also see the expression of worship that came from the heart of Hannah. After experiencing answers to her prayer, there is a lovely outburst of praise from her heart. Seeing God's purposes in our lives should bring the same expression from our hearts.

From Elijah, we see the heart that he has for God's people. Do we have a prayerful concern for the people of God? Some of us may be very selfish in our prayers, praying only for our own needs, family and friends. We can also take heart from the way that Elijah thinks and feels. Even the greatest of God's servants felt the same as we sometimes feel. Often we feel very low, sometimes we think we are the only ones with certain thoughts and desires, but the Bible proves that we are not. We must remember that God is always watching out for us; His eye is always on us whether we are in open communication with Him or not. We may feel that we are the only ones doing God's will but we will never be alone in the service of God; He will always have those who will serve Him. God always cares for His servants; God uses His servants, God comforts and sustains every beloved servant of His.

From Daniel, we see the benefit of regular, habitual praying. There needs to be that two way communication that we talked about earlier. We also see that we should pray together with others. We must take a lesson from Daniel's *"purpose of heart"* which is pre-conceived discipline. We see in Daniel's life that the God given courage and power throughout his life came from his prayer life. If we are in constant touch with God and depend upon Him in every aspect of our daily lives we will be ready and available for God to use us and we will have more powerful lives. We see God's almighty power in Daniel but we also see God's care for His willing and obedient servant.

Conclusion

The more we understand what God is like and what He plans to do in our lives, the more joy we will receive on a daily basis and the more powerful our lives may be for God. So let us all make the effort to pray regularly and, as we do so, let us pray with respect and reverence to a loving and faithful God.

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