

Foundations of Joy: Cultivating a Godward Life
1 Samuel 2:1-10

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God”

Introduction: The faithful shepherd boy named David who grew up to be King knew the joy of trusting the Lord and the misery of trusting himself. As a young man he cultivated a relationship with God that took Him at His Word, which allowed David to kill the bear and lion, defending his sheep, and the giant Goliath, defending God’s people (1 Sam. 17:45). David could endure threats against his life and living in caves to keep away from Saul because He knew God was in control. In trusting in the might of God and not his own, David became the greatest warrior king in Israel’s history, displaying both wisdom and a heart of worship as a man after God’s own heart. You could say that the *secret* to David’s success was not a ruddy appearance or great aim, but the fact that He was whole-hearted in his pursuit of his God, displaying a unique and extraordinary dependency on Him.

Yet, David was sinful, just like you and me. In stretches of taking his eyes off of his Lord, he looked outside of his marriage covenant and pursued the wife of another, a man who proved more righteous than he. At the end of his life when one would think he’d grown in confidence and contended faith, he instead ordered a census taken of his military might, assuaging his frustration with his people and the Lord, counting his over-a-million soldiers to bask in his strength. This brought swift and dire repercussions in the tune of 70,000 men dying as a result (2 Sam. 24:15).

Conventional wisdom (or “worldly wisdom”) would say that “might makes right”. We have in our mind the way that life should be, or what will make us the most happy, or bring about our greatest desires, and we pursue those to the fullest. A life of family, money, power, unity, meaning, retirement, ease, comfort, etc. is what is hoped for, or some other iteration of the same. If we get what we want, it equals happiness. If we do not, it equals misery. When we have artificial goals for happiness in marriage and family, men will try to **fix things** to make it happen, while wives/moms will try to **control outcomes**, especially when it comes to their children. Both of these responses use methods consistent with the world: control, power, and strength to manipulate or control to get what we ultimately want. All of this *works*, until it doesn’t! If you’ve ever tried to fix or control circumstances or been in relationship with someone who does, you know that it only ends in joylessness and misery, since the outcomes or goals are never attained, and if they are, they never satisfy. Whether trusting in *horses, chariots, or our own abilities*, looking to ourselves to fix marriages, get our kids to comply, or find satisfaction in our possessions or accomplishments will leave us miserable, lonely, and left blaming anyone and everyone else for our problems.

Two weeks ago, we started in the book of 1 Samuel looking at the life and plight of Hannah, a faithful woman from a humble background (a nobody from nowhere). What was remarkable about her life is that **in spite** of her circumstance of ongoing **infertility, a non-understanding husband, and another wife that tore her down continually**, Hannah fought to trust the Lord and pursue Him in worship, allowing her to not only persevere but do so with dignity and joy. God used this situation and woman to usher in a leader of the nation in Samuel, who would be a key figure in bringing in the **monarchy**, a pivotal change that would ultimately lead to the revelation of the Messiah Jesus.

How did Hannah do it? How was she so faithful? How did she endure? The answer is: **she had a persistent and deliberate Godward life**. She trusted whom she knew. She understood how He operated. She believed His promises were greater than her circumstances. Our goal this morning is to

see this progression in a remarkable prayer, prayed by a simple woman with profound faith, in the hope that we too will cultivate a Godward life so that we can have joy in every area of life.

A Godward Life Pursues a Personal Knowledge of God (1-3)

And Hannah prayed and said, *"My heart exults in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.*

*There is **none holy like the LORD**: for there is **none besides you**; there is **no rock like our God**. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth; for **the LORD is a God of knowledge**, and by him actions are weighed."*

There is a cavernous difference between knowing facts about someone and knowing them. Knowledge puffs up and makes proud, but when we pursue someone to know them, it breeds appreciation and trust. You can look up information about someone that fits on a 3 x 5 card, from birthplace and date to favorite food and restaurant. But knowing someone entails knowing all of that information AND knowing what makes them tick, perceiving how they are processing and feeling, and what they are passionate about. Hannah had a growing knowledge of God because she pursued Him through knowledge which bred both treasuring and trusting.

As she reflected back on the whole experience of infertility, desperation in prayer, God answering, and giving her son back to the LORD, she had no other reasonable response other than to **rejoice in the LORD**. Now, one might say, "Of course she rejoiced, God answered HER prayer!" But notice her prayer was NOT one of thankfulness for what she RECEIVED from God, but focused on God Himself. In other words her goal in all of life was to worship the LORD and give Him glory, so He was the object of praise regardless of outcome. David wrote in Psalm 37:3-4, *"Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. **Delight yourself in the LORD, and HE will give you the desires of your heart.**"* Does this mean that if I delight in the Lord I will get whatever I ask for?!? Yes and no! No, in the sense if we are asking for anything that will take us away from treasuring or trusting in the Lord, but YES if our delight IS the Lord, we WILL get Him. *"Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of **knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**"* (Phil. 3:8). When Hannah uses the word "**horn**", those in an agricultural world would know that a beast would hold its head and horns high as a symbol of **victory and power**. Her power was NOT something that she could conjure up but found solely in her Lord. She could hold her head high with dignity BECAUSE of God's work in her life, rather than pointing to her own work and accomplishments. Though she easily could have prayed imprecatory prayers against her enemies, with Penninah being at the forefront, she instead focused on God's work of salvation in her life, calling the arrogant and self-sufficient boasters to cease looking to self and boast in the Lord alone (Jer. 9:24).

Next, Hannah mentions **three specific ways** that she knows God and trusts Him. The more we know about the character and attributes of God, the more deeply we appreciate, rest in, and rely on Him.

- **God is UNIQUE** – God is holy other. There is no darkness, corruption, or impurity in Him, and His eyes are purer than to see evil and cannot look at wrong (Hab. 1:13). He is free from impure motives and does everything to fulfill His will and bring Himself glory. He is so pure that He can be described as *jealous*, since His jealousy is based on His perfect holiness (Ex. 20:5). Now to the unrighteous this attribute would be a terror, but to those who know salvation, this attribute is a comfort. We know that in any and every circumstance that we are going through, He is doing it for His glory and our ultimate good, which is defined as a refining of our faith and growing in understanding of Him (1 Pet. 1:6-9).

- **God is UNFALTERING** – Everything and everyone that we put our trust in will ultimately let us down (just as I will let people down). When people disappoint or fail, it is difficult to trust again. But when the Bible describes God as a rock and fortress (Ps. 18:2), it signals that God is immovable, unchangeable, and the same yesterday, today and forever. No one can uproot Him or shove Him out of the way, and it's this promise that we bank on, that no one will take us out of the hand of our Savior, whether it's others, circumstances, or our own stupid sin.
- **God is UNCOMPROMISING** – The solace that Hannah took in all circumstances is that God knows all things, will judge all things, and no one gets away with nothin' (1 Cor. 4:5). She could call all the arrogant to cease because God knew of their boasting.

This last point is important as we assess the world and our life in it, especially as things do not go according to plan. God is the savior of the broken, crushed, condemned and weak who humbles themselves before Him in faith, but He always acts according to His own perfect purposes. That is why we need to ground ourselves in the truth rather than look around at the world for wisdom. When we look around instead of up, we come to wrong conclusions. Consider the argument of **Asaph in Psalm 73**:

While he had kept his heart pure (1), he looked around with *envy at the seeming prosperity of the wicked and arrogant* (3), because they seemed to have *no pangs until death, were fat and sleek* (4), *they were always at ease and increased in riches* (12). They were scoffers, prideful, violent, yet they succeeded while righteousness leads to NONE of these positive things. This turned Asaph's heart to *bitterness* (21). Have you ever felt that way? As long as he looked OUT, he was bitter. Until he finally looked UP, entered the sanctuary of God to worship (17), then he gained perspective. And what was the answer to his problem? A change of circumstance? Riches, no pain, and fatty sleekness? Nope, it was a robust, personal, experiential knowledge of God:

"Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (26)

A Godward Life Understands How God Rules the World (4-8)

*"The bows of the **mighty** are broken, but the **feeble** bind on strength.*

*Those who were **full** have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were **hungry** have ceased to hunger.*

*The **barren** has borne seven, but she who has **many** children is forlorn.*

*The LORD **kills** and **brings to life**; He **brings down** to Sheol and **raises up**. The LORD makes **poor** and makes **rich**; he brings **low** and **exalts**.*

*He raises the **poor** from the dust; he lifts the **needy** from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor.*

For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world."

The second main point that Hannah knew and prayed is a full understanding of how God operates in this world. To start with the end and work back, she understood that all things in the world are the Lord's poetically stating that the earth is set on the pillars God has fixed. Because He owns, sustains, and creates everything, He makes the ultimate rules. And the way He operates is to glorify Himself and confound the wisdom of the world.

Those who think they are mighty on their own will be broken. Those who seek fullness and satisfaction materially in this world will never be satisfied. Even a family will ultimately not bring all that one desires in life. The reality is that God is in charge of all things, including physical life and death, eternal life,

riches and poverty, and kings and kingdoms. It does not take long to look around this world, watch the news or listen to people trying to figure life out to observe that everyone is striving to control, produce, or conclude ONLY what God Himself can. We try to add days onto life only to yield to the inevitability of death. We find comfort and assurance in wealth, only to have it be a pandemic or accounting error away from being gone. Even our BEST efforts of trying to wipe out poverty misunderstands that God is the One who ultimately brings poverty and wealth, as He is the One who shines the sun and brings the rain. In this God is NOT a killjoy nor does He play games with mankind ("watch them squirm when I take away all their money...."), but He does all things to help turn our eyes to Him. Even God's salvation involves the **reversal of fortune** in which the proud and violent are humbled and the poor and meek are exalted. Consider how Paul describes the gospel in 1 Corinthians 1:25-29:

*"For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were **wise according to worldly standards, not too many powerful**, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, **so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.**"*

The cross of Jesus is foolishness to those who are perishing (1:18), since the wisdom of the world sees might as right, not a humble savior. The Jews wanted a powerful Messiah, One who would rule and cast out their enemies, not One who was a sacrifice once for all. But God operates out of HIS authority, rule, and strength, and will not share His glory with anyone else. He succeeds where mankind continually fails, and this is the best news ever for us. We come in our brokenness, our weakness, shame, guilt, and desperation, and He lifts us up in Christ. He even is willing to keep us low, as He did with Paul, so that we would not be tempted to boast in ourselves but instead glory in our weakness and rely on His grace (2 Cor. 12:5-9). We are at our absolute strongest, most joyful, content, and satisfied when we are purely reliant on Him, dependant on His grace alone. This is what Hannah knew, and why she could persevere. It is exactly what Mary knew and said almost identically a thousand years later,

*"He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; **he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.**" (Luke 1:51-53).*

Two women who rejoiced in their Savior and salvation and rejoiced in the midst of hard circumstances because of their Godward pursuit, both of whom were nobodies from nowhere, but who had extraordinary faith in their Lord. But Hannah had one more aspect to her Godward life, and that was her clinging to the future promises of God.

A Godward Life Clings to the Promises of God (9-10)

*He will guard the feet of His faithful ones, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, **for not by might shall a man prevail.***

The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven.

*The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the **horn of His anointed.**"*

Finally, Hannah had a faith driven, Godward pursuit that looked forward to the promises of God. Promises kept are only as sure as the promise maker, and God always keeps His. It is one thing to trust in God's promises when life is moving in a positive direction (you have a job, marriage is in non-conflict,

kids are well behaved, etc), but quite another when things are hitting the fan. There were three clear promises that Hannah clung to in the midst of the best and worst of circumstances:

1. **God is a perfect and consistent judge, so the choice in any circumstance is clear** – In every situation we want to know how we should act. How do I respond to my spouse when I've been wronged? Or when I was treated unjustly at my job? Or what do I do when my child won't obey? Or what do we do when a government overreaches? Life decisions are certainly nuanced and every situation demands a high level of trust driven, grace drenched wisdom to discern the best course, but most often, we know the right thing to do, it's simply *difficult to achieve*. Hannah knew God is opposed to the wicked and those who oppose Him, and that is anyone who disobeys Him. So when my spouse acts wrong toward me, this gives no license to respond in kind, but rather in love. The same in every other situation. We walk *faithfully* knowing that God knows, sees, rewards, and judges righteously, remembering that no one gets away with anything.
2. **When we trust our own strength we will fail** – There is a summary phrase here "*not by might shall a man prevail*", with the conclusion of that statement implied *but by the LORD*. What is the essence of this statement? We can stop trying to fix every situation or person by our own strength, and instead walk obediently and trust the Lord is working. We can stop trying to control every situation and instead trust the Lord is working and walk obediently. In the midst of this trust, we look to what God is teaching us, how He is revealing pride and selfishness, and where I've been relying on my own wisdom rather than Him. Remember, the heat of circumstances **reveal our heart** rather than **cause our sin**. When we try our hardest in our own strength and things STILL break down, we get to the end of our rope, and then turn to God in desperation. A Godward life looks to a good God in the beginning, the middle, and the end of every situation in desperation, knowing that the outcomes are up to Him, but He calls me to be faithful in the midst.

I mentioned last week that this chapter is about parenting, and here is where we see it. Starting in verse 12, the author talks about the wicked sons of the priest, Eli, in juxtaposition to the righteous son of Hannah named Samuel. We will see that Eli had made an idol out of his kids and neglected a Godward life, to the detriment of his family and the nation. Here is a principle that is most important in your marriage and parenting: A Godward life is vital to set the right course of obedient discipline over idolatry (willing to be the bad guy with your kids), trust over control, and relying on God's strength over your own. We've said before that one of the greatest gifts you can give your kids is letting them know that mom and dad truly love each other, but the greatest gift is then seeing a true, honest, and transparent Godward life. This pursuit is not mere duty, not moralistic, not shame filled or guilt ridden, not joyless when life is hard, and not neglected when life is good. A house is truly in order when God is the focal point in worship and trust, and that cannot be faked and will give our kids grounding in the truth and security in all circumstances.

3. **There was a Messiah coming** – Much like Mary's magnificat, Hannah's prayer is eternally significant. Notice the last line about the "horn of His anointed". Before Israel would demand a king, Hannah trusted one would come. This is the first direct reference in the OT to God's promised "Messiah", which in the NT Greek is rendered "Christ"¹ In faith she looked forward to God providing a king that would rule in justice for His people. This faith allowed her to see justice deferred. We have the same hope, that our Messiah Jesus will return one day to reign

¹ Richard Philips, Reformed Expository Commentary, p. 49.

and rule in His Kingdom, bringing justice, ruling righteously, and loving purely. It is a hope of what is to come that allows us to persevere in the moment.

Some will trust in horses, some in chariots, some in their bank account, some in the force of their will, some in the strength of personality, some in the ability to fix, some in the desire to control, and some in the authority they wield. *But we will trust in the LORD our God.* We trust the One who became poor for us, who left glory to become a servant and sin for us, so that we can have life in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). We walk faithfully, IN JOY, knowing that He has worked the darkest of circumstances out for His glory in Christ, and will work through our most difficult to His glory and our good, making us more dependent on Him, rooting out self-trust, and leaving us new.