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SERMON TITLE: Why Does God Want Us to Pray?

SCRIPTURE: 1 Samuel 1:1-20

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Once I mentioned to a friend that God has a personality. That friend strongly objected. He didn't see it that way. That was making God too human—and potentially too capricious. But even years later, I am sticking with my premise.

- ~ To believe otherwise seems to make God passive.
- ~ To believe otherwise is to see God as non-engaging, unreceptive, and benign.
- ~ To see God as without personality makes God a principle rather than a person.

We sing the hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy"

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!

*God in three **Persons**, blessed Trinity.*

God is a person—not a human person—but the fact that Jesus came as a man lets us know of God's desire to engage with us personally.

Here are some of the facets of God's personality in the Bible:

"**God was grieved** by their misery" (Judges 10:16).

"They tested **God's patience** and provoked the Holy One" (Psalm 78:41).

"**God is always ready to help** in times of trouble" (Ps 46:1).

"The LORD was **very angry** with the Israelites" (Joshua 7:1)

"The LORD was **no longer angry**" (Joshua 7:26).

"For your own sake, Lord, **smile** again on your desolate sanctuary" (Daniel 9:17).

"For the LORD **loves** justice, and **will never abandon** the godly" (Ps 37:28).

Here's one from the New Testament. Paul writes in Romans:

"Don't you see how **wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient** God is with you?" (2:4a)

When you understand the emotions and personality of God, it gives you a leg up when you pray.

When you seek out someone's advice, don't you prefer to confide in someone who is patient, kind, and loyal? Don't you seek people who love the truth?

When you call upon the Lord, if you know something about God, you will have more faith. Perhaps that is exactly why God displays a personality—for you to know and love God better.

The greatest thing in life is to love God without reservation and depend on God when you have need.

God desires for us to pray when we have the need. Why? Prayer honors God.

We have a natural inclination to pray. But I am not talking about: *Lord, help this lottery ticket to win!*

I'm talking about the need to pray like Hannah. Hers was a very serious need. Her whole identity was wrapped up in her need. Hannah was the most loved by her husband but the most insignificant person in the family. In her world a woman's value was completely wrapped around her bearing children.

If we equated that to our world, it might be equivalent to feeling your career is not successful enough; you lack educational advantages; or your children have not achieved what you expected. Yet none of those things truly hinder women in 2021. We have many options. But in Hannah's time, there was one thing—producing children. Her lack resulted in great shame and turmoil in the family.

She could not get over it. Her husband could do nothing to help.

Year after year she suffered, wept, and couldn't eat. She was depressed. She was mocked and reviled, and the other wife became her enemy.

There were no drugs, surgeries, or counseling. God had closed her womb.

Sometimes God does not come through and we have adversity.

But remember God's character? God is grieved when we have misery. God does not like injustice (in this case—Peninnah lording it over Hannah). God wants to help; to take the stress off; to give you hope; to help you have greater understanding about resourcing him.

God wants you to love God more; to gain the Holy Spirit; to hear Jesus' voice.

God wanted that for Hannah and God wants that for you. God had plans for this miserable, insignificant though loved woman. And it all involved a baby.

Sometimes your greatest lack or loss has to do with the very gain you desire.

But those kinds of gains for the person of faith do not come from you, they come from God alone. How would God manage this? What is God's deeper goal?

God has two goals in this passage. God is bringing a prophet to the people of Israel. This prophet would lead the great transition to Israel becoming a kingdom.

The prophet would need a mother with the hand of God on her; a mother who lived by faith. He would need a mother who experienced the presence and power of God in a very real way.

How do you learn to live by faith? PRAY.

If you avoid personal connection with God, it will be impossible to believe God. If you never talk to God your trust will be low.

In prayer, you lay down your lacks and quit limping in your lacks. You begin as you are, in all your needs.

God loves this. God is all about lifting up.

So Hannah laid down her burdens.
She laid down her war with the other wife.
She laid down her sword and shield that kept the battle going inside her.

She put on her sword and shield of faith.

She went to the temple with great intention. She presented herself before the Lord. This was no small gift. This took huge effort to honor God in front of others.

It would be like you coming to the front of the sanctuary during worship and kneeling down and pouring out your heart in prayer.

She prayed a long time and was making a spectacle of herself. We struggle with even going at the end of the service to have someone pray with us! But she was desperate.

She wept bitterly while praying.

- It's hard to pray when you are utterly dependent on God to change things, but she prayed anyway.
- It's hard to admit you have no control.
- It's hard to ask God not to forget you when you feel your whole life is forgotten.
- It's hard to pour out your soul and ask for exactly what you want.

But she did all these things and asked for a male child. Then she honored God by promising to give him back to God.

Perhaps some of the Apostle Paul's wisdom about prayer was taken from this suffering, insignificant woman.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. (Philippians 4:6)

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers (Ephesians 6:18).

Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness. (Ephesians 6:14)

In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. (Ephesians 6:16)

Hannah was truthful to God and was committing herself to something honorable. She got up holding up her shield of faith when she "ate and drank with her husband and her countenance was no longer sad."

We need to ask ourselves two questions.

1. What is it that you lack that you would like the Lord to provide? Would you be willing to turn to the Lord and pray about that very thing?
2. Why does God want you to pray? Perhaps your relationship with God needs to be closer; your trust needs to grow; your faith needs to be bolstered; you need to know God cares; you need to lay your burdens down and let go of your sword toward someone else.

In due time God remembered Hannah and she had a son. She kept her promise regarding that son. She would later write that God made her strong through that trial. God had given her triumph over her enemy. She advised us, "Humbly rely on him and God will lift you up." (1 Sam 2)

God has given you a great gift. It might just be your greatest lack that he wants to change. After Samuel, Hannah had six more children. God gives you more than you can ask or imagine. *Won't you pray?*

AMEN