

1 Samuel 1:4-20 On the day when Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters; but to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. Her rival used to provoke her severely, to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. So it went on year by year; as often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?" After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the LORD. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD, and wept bitterly. She made this vow: "O LORD of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head." As she continued praying before the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him." And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your sight." Then the woman went to her quarters, ate and drank with her husband, and her countenance was sad no longer. They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the LORD; then they went back to their house at Ramah. Elkanah knew his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the LORD."

Perseverance

“A young pastor was sitting in a restaurant eating lunch. He opened a letter he'd just received that morning from his mom. As he opened it a twenty-dollar bill fell out. He thought to himself, Thanks, Mom, I sure needed that right now. As he finished his meal, he noticed a beggar outside on the sidewalk leaning against the light post. Thinking that the poor man could probably use the twenty dollars more

than he, he crossed out the names on the envelope and wrote across the top in large letters, PERSEVERE!

So as not to make a scene, he put the envelope under his arm and dropped it as he walked past the man. The man picked it up and read the message and smiled. The next day, as the pastor enjoyed his meal, the same man tapped him on the shoulder and handed him a big wad of bills. Surprised, the young pastor asked him what that was for. The man replied, "This is your half of the winnings. Persevere came in first in the fourth race at the track yesterday and paid thirty to one."*(jokesoftheday.net)

Well clearly Hannah persevered! Though her husband's other wife took every opportunity to remind Hannah she was barren and so had no value, Hannah kept on asking God for what she wanted. She bargained that if God gave her a son, she would dedicate his life to God through the temple. She prayed and refused to give up. I wonder if her struggle is similar to ours in answering the question, "What is God doing in my life?"

For though our answer to "What is God doing in my life?" changes as some doors open and others close, God continues to be at work in our lives. Persevering in faith like Hannah seems the key to open the door to what is next for us. We are to keep on asking God for what we want especially when there seems to be no answer or reward for all our prayerful efforts.

For even Jesus tells us to be obnoxious in our asking. Saying if a family has gone to bed and someone comes in the middle of the night and knocks on the door and refuses to go away, God will answer and give us what we want if only to get rid of us. I imagine this was said with humor. CS Lewis found his persevering in prayer for his wife in her years of illness with cancer changed him, not God.

Another well known story of perseverance is the story of William Wilberforce. Many here who saw the movie "Amazing Grace" know his story. By reading between the lines we can assume the hymn "Amazing Grace" was already written. For William often went to visit the former slaver who wrote these words, now a monk in a local abbey. For he gave away all his wealth and stood to fight slavery and to atone for the thousands who died in transit on his slave ships. After William was introduced to an African, Olaudah Equiano, who told William he had been a prince like him before capture into slavery, William as a witty and well-liked member of the English Parliament began his campaign to end slavery.

Why I remember most is a Wilberforce quote. He said, “Our motto must continue to be perseverance. And ultimately I trust the Almighty will crown our efforts with success.”

Now since slavery was such a lucrative business, engaged in by many in Parliament as the basis of their wealth, Wilberforce’s initial efforts failed. He then tried other tactics like getting hundreds and hundreds of signatures in support of the abolition of slavery. Yet in this time of monarchy during the French Revolution, letting the people decide was met with cried of “treason!” and failure yet again.

It was only after William met a bright young noble woman who supported him and his efforts and they fell in love and married that he again found the strength to persevere. After thirty years of faithful and prayerful effort by William Wilberforce, the English Parliament voted to outlaw slavery. This meant no British ship might ever again carry slaves or trade in human misery.

For great things can happen when we persevere. In more recent times, Edison found over 50,000 ways not to make a light bulb, he said, before he finally made one that worked. Just like the story I heard of the “rite of initiation” for any new engineer coming into a certain department at General Electric (GE). In this particular work group, a newly hired engineer was given the task of developing a light bulb which gave off no heat. After a few weeks of trying, he would return with head down and admit failure. All the other engineers would then laugh and slap him on the back saying, “It’s impossible so don’t feel bad. It’s only an initiation ritual for those joining our work team.” Then one day the new engineer returned with a bulb he developed that gave off no heat. As no one had told him it was impossible, since he did not know it could not be done, he did it.

If we believe all things are possible to God and persevere in asking, “What is God doing in my life? then we will discover our answer. In it will be the seed of our new vision - where we are going and what we will do over the next 10 years, as well as what we desire to look like as a congregation in 30 years. Like Hannah, persevering in prayer will reveal God’s heart’s desire for us as vision of our future.