

Saving a Nation by Closing a Womb

Introduction to the life of David Pt.1: Samuel

1 Samuel 1-7

Summary: We are beginning a study of the life of David because he is so emphasized in Scripture. Samuel comes at the end of the period of the Judges, a low point for Israel. God closes Hannah's womb to get her to pray hard resulting in the birth of Samuel, who is not on the end of her suffering but the deliverer for the whole nation, a prophet, priest and king-maker. He replaces the corrupt priesthood of Eli's house. After Israel is slaughtered and the ark taken, in response to Samuel-led repentance God delivers them in amazing ways without them even having to fight. So 1) Seek God, do not use Him, 2) Remember the big picture – your suffering has a huge purpose, and 3) Make God's glory the purpose of your requests.

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Introduction

David is emphasized in Scripture

Pop quiz: Besides Jesus, whose name do you think is mentioned most often in Scripture? If you had to guess which men were mentioned the most out of this list – who would come first - Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, Elijah, and Paul. If we list them from the least often mentioned to the most, it would come out this way: Adam is mentioned 24 times in Scripture. Next come Isaiah and Noah – 53 times and 54 times. Then it doubles when you get to Elijah - 113 times, and doubles again with Paul at 210, and Abraham at 230. Then it really jumps up when you get to Moses – 847 times. But the most of all by far is David. His name appears 1089 times in Scripture. He's mentioned twice in Scripture *by name* before he's even born!

The story of David's life begins about halfway through 1 Samuel (chapter 16) and dominates the next 49 chapters of God's Word until he finally dies in 1 Kings 10. On top of that, 1 Chronicles 11-29 is all about the life of David. That is another 19 chapters. So that is a total of 68 chapters of God's Word.

One thing is very, very clear – God wants us to know all about David. If God mentions someone over 1000 times – 400 more times than Adam, Isaiah, Noah, Elijah, Paul and Abraham all put together, it makes you think maybe God wants you to understand some things about David. And a big reason for that is that knowing about the life of David is important for understanding the Psalms. And understanding the Psalms is crucial for understanding what it means to know God, to love God, and to commune with God. God gave us a lot of details about the life of the man He chose to be our chief worship leader, because so much of what we learn about how to worship comes from the interactions between David and God that arose from the life situations of David. So it is essential that we know about his life. And beyond that, understanding David is crucial for understanding Jesus. Almost all messianic prophecy in is based on David and God's promises to him.

And if all that is not enough, perhaps the biggest reason of all to study what the Bible says about David is in 1 Samuel 13:14 where God refers to David as a man after His own heart. Even after David committed adultery and murder, God selected Him as the main worship leader not only for Israel, but also for the Church - all of God's people for the last 3000 years and from now until the Lord Jesus returns. David – even with all his sins and failure – is the one God chose to teach His people throughout the ages how to worship Him and how to walk with Him. Very few people, if any, (except for Jesus Himself), have ever loved God like David loved God.

During the years after David's death – from the time of the divided kingdom until the exile - each king that came to the throne was assessed according to how well his character measured up to David's. Following David's example became the standard for whether or not God would bless a king and bless Israel during that king's rule. Right at the very beginning God told Solomon:

1 Kings 9:4-5 if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did ... ⁵ I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever¹

But at the end of his life the sad assessment of Solomon was that he did not measure up to David:
1 Kings 11:6 Solomon did evil in the eyes of Yahweh; he did not follow Yahweh completely, as David his father had done.

He followed the Lord, but not completely like David.

In ch.14 we get the final assessment of Jeroboam's reign directly from the mouth of God.

1 Kings 14:8 ...you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes.

The assessment of king Abijah's life is in 1 Ki.15:3.

1 Ki.15:3 his heart was not fully devoted to Yahweh his God, as the heart of David his forefather had been.

¹ God said the same thing to Jeroboam in 11:38.

1 Ki.15:11 Asa did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh, as his father David had done.

2 Ki.14:3 [Amaziah] did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh, but not as his father David had done.

He came close, but not quite as good as David.

2 Ki.16:2 Ahaz ... reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of Yahweh his God.

2 Ki.18:3 [Hezekiah] did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh, just as his father David had done.

2 Ki.22:2 [Josiah] did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh and walked in all the ways of his father David

David is the Old Testament standard for godliness, and not only for kings, but also for the people themselves. The reason the kingdom was divided in the first place was because God punished them for not following the example of David's faithfulness.

1 Ki.11:33 I will do this because they have ... not walked in my ways, nor done what is right in my eyes, nor kept my statutes and laws as David, Solomon's father, did. ³⁴ "But I will not take the whole kingdom out of Solomon's hand; I have made him ruler all the days of his life for the sake of David my servant, whom I chose and who observed my commands and statutes.

God gave us 68 chapters on David because He wanted us to have a crystal clear idea of what faithfulness to God looks like.

Now, of course we have an infinitely greater example of how to live a godly life in the life of Jesus, who never sinned. And that is why we preach Christ far more than we preach about David. However, one thing you cannot learn from Jesus' example is how your own sin fits into the equation of walking with the Lord. We do not learn from Jesus' example how to repent of sin and recover from failure. And in addition to that, the life of David gives us insight into some of the kingly aspects of Christ that are not yet fully in place. The reign of David was designed by God to teach us how to have joyful hope in the coming reign of Christ. So we are going to begin a study of the second half of the books of Samuel.

Historical Context: After the period of the Judges, Israelite low point

The first mention of David by name in Samuel comes in chapter 16. But I do not want to just jump right into the middle of the book, because I doubt we will be able to understand the second half of the book if we have not taken at least a brief look at the first half. So first let me set up the context of the book so you know where we are in history.

After Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt they wandered in the desert for 40 years and then entered the Promised Land. The book of Joshua tells the story of their conquest of the Promised Land. Then comes the period of the Judges, which is the period from the conquest up to the time of Israel's

first king. That period went for about 300 years, starting in the 1300's B.C. (By the way, if you want a quick and easy way to set some landmark dates to understand Jewish history – just think in terms of 500 year increments. The most important dates are around 500 BC, 1000, 1500, and 2000. 2000 BC is the time of Abraham, 1500 is Moses and the Exodus, 1000 is David, and 500 is the exile when Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jews were carried off to Babylon. Those are rough dates, but accurate within about 100 years.) So the few hundred years leading up to the time of David was the time of the Judges.

And that period was probably the low point of Jewish history. When they came to the Promised land the people living there were incredibly wicked, and God commanded Israel to exterminate them completely. But Israel disobeyed, let them live, and soon became just like them. The level of wickedness in Israel at that time was so extreme that the book of Judges is really an R-rated book. You have to have a strong stomach to even read it. There is violence and immorality and murder; you have women being raped to death, and then cut up into pieces and put in the mail causing civil war. It is a time of terrible rebellion against God.

Once in a while when God sent severe punishment they cry out to God for deliverance, and God would send a judge to deliver them. But then they would always go right back to their rebellion.

In-between the book of Judges and the books of Samuel there is a little book called Ruth. The purpose of Ruth is basically to say, "Even though things have sunk to an all time low, don't despair – David's coming." Ruth is the delightful little story of how David's great grandma and grandpa met and got married. If you look at the last chapter in the book of Ruth you will notice that the very last word in the book is "David."

Samuel's: Rescuer of an obscure woman and a whole nation

Zoom lens

This brings us to the books of Samuel. Samuel begins with the story of Samuel's birth. Whoever wrote the book of Samuel was a master storyteller. It is like if you were watching a movie and it started out with the camera zoomed in on a woman who was drowning and crying out for help. And then God sends someone to pull her into a little eight-foot rescue boat. And a nice little smile comes across your face as you think, "That's a nice little story." And just then the camera pans back and you see, surrounding this little rescue boat, indescribably chaos. And huge cruise ship is sinking, and thousands of people are in the water drowning. And by the time the camera zooms far enough out to see all the carnage, that little rescue boat looks like a little dot on the ocean. And at the amazing, unexpected end of the story it turns out that the size of that rescue boat was deceiving at first, and it is plenty big enough to rescue all those thousands of people. This is the story of the first seven chapters of 1 Samuel.

The story begins with the camera zoomed all the way in to one obscure nobody woman who lived with her husband up in the hills of Ephraim. And this hillbilly lady had a little crisis going in her life. She cried out to God for help, and God answered her cries. And she responds with this wonderful psalm of praise for God's deliverance in chapter two.

Then, midway through chapter two, the camera begins to pan back to show you the bigger picture. And a lovely little story of a woman with a personal crisis who gets her prayers answered turns into a much, much bigger story. As the camera zooms out and you start to get the bigger picture, it takes your breath away. The writer shows you the crisis that the entire nation was in. And that was a crisis of *mammoth* proportions.

The rescue boat is the birth of Samuel, which is described in chapter one. Any time the Bible gives you the story of someone's birth you know God is getting ready to do a great work of deliverance. God wants us to understand that He does not find great deliverers for His people by reviewing thousands of resumes. The great deliverers in Scripture are great deliverers because God picked them out before they were born and planned for them to be great deliverers. And that was the case with Samuel.

Answer to prayer

Samuel comes into existence as a result of passionate, fervent, intense, heartfelt, persistent prayer. Hannah is barren, which was about the worst fate a Hebrew woman could suffer at that time. It was the way to participate in God's promise to bless the whole world through the offspring of Abraham. It should be a painful fate for any woman of any time, because children are a gift from God. People who are married but who do not want children do not have the same priorities as God. But Hannah did, and so she desperately wanted to conceive a child. Her husband had another wife who was able to have children, and that woman saw Hannah in her brokenness and tears, and did everything she could to rub it in and to make Hannah feel even worse. 1 Samuel 1:6 And because Yahweh had closed [Hannah's] womb, her rival (**the other wife**) kept provoking her in order to irritate her.

This other woman's name was Pinninah. She was ruthless. She assaulted Hannah right at her most tender, most sensitive, most vulnerable place. Hannah would weep so bitterly that she could not even eat. (verse seven) Most of us get upset and eat twice as much as normal. Imagine how grieved you have to be to not be able to eat. The home should be a refuge from suffering, but for Hannah it was the place of daily torment.

So Hannah goes with her family to worship at the Tabernacle like they did every year, and Hannah starts pouring her heart out to God in anguish, asking for relief from her plight. She gets so lost in prayer that her lips are moving even though she is praying silently. And the High Priest, Eli (who has all the spiritual sensitivity of a doorknob), concludes that she must be drunk and he rebukes her. But then when he finds out her situation he says

1 Sam.1:17 Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

¹⁸ ... **Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.**

God's Comfort

What a sweet and beautiful picture of how God comforts the afflicted. Then she came and "poured out her heart" to God, and went away happy and no longer downcast and with a restored appetite and ability to enjoy food. And the amazing thing is nothing in her circumstances had changed! She still did not have any children, she was not pregnant, and that other wife was still there. Nothing had changed except for the fact that she had been in the presence of God and received grace from Him. The joy that seemed like it could only come if circumstances changed, came without

circumstances changing. God is capable of giving joy and satisfaction of soul apart from circumstances.

That is so basic – you have heard it all your life. And we all think we believe it. And yet, very few really believe it when this magnitude of pain hits. When you are in a situation that is so excruciating that you can't even eat, and the pain is so intense that tears are streaming down your face uncontrollably, it is next to impossible to believe that you could have fullness of joy and deep, sweet, profound peace, even if that pain continues indefinitely.

But I can tell you with absolute certainty that God has promised that it is true! Hannah did not walk out of there painting on a happy face and pretending to be joyful. She walked out *actually* happy! And it was a happiness that affected her body – her appetite came back. No circumstances can give you the happiness you are craving. But God can, and He can do it with or without changing circumstances. In Hannah's case He did it first without changing circumstances, and then, after she had the joy, He went ahead and changed her circumstances and piled on even more joy.² Hannah became pregnant with Samuel. So that is the drowning woman that gets pulled into the little rescue boat. Now let's back up and see the Titanic sinking.

The sinking Titanic

The Corrupt Priesthood

In chapter two we find that the priesthood was incredibly corrupt. Eli's sons were stealing sacrifices from people by force. On top of that they were committing sexual immorality right in the Temple.

Eli rebuked them, but did not do anything to restrain them. In fact, he got so fat eating that meat they stole that his obesity eventually led to his death. And so God pronounced a judgment on them.

2:29 ...Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?'

(Interesting – when you fail to discipline your children, or when you discipline only with words and not actions, you are honoring your children more than God.) God tells him that all his descendents will die in the prime of life, including his sons Hophni and Phinehas. (2:31-34)

Samuel the true prophet of God

35 I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his house, and he will minister before my anointed one always.

Who is this priest going to be?

² When it is time for my prayer time or devotions and I say, "I think I will do that a little later," why do I do that? Why do I want to postpone my time with the Lord when it is possible for me to do it right now? The reason I want to postpone it is because there is something else I want to do right now. My soul wants the benefits that will come from this other thing that I want to do right now. My soul is expecting to get pleasure or satisfaction or joy or peace or comfort or rest or something like that from this alternate activity, and my soul is not expecting to get that benefit in as great a measure from time spent with God. If I really believed that those things would come in greatest measure from being in the presence of God, I would prefer nothing over seeking Him.

3:1 The boy Samuel ministered before Yahweh under Eli. In those days the word of Yahweh was rare; there were not many visions. 2 One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place...

And it goes on to immediately tell the story of when God spoke to the boy Samuel at night and he kept thinking it was Eli calling him. If you grew up going to Sunday School I am sure you will remember this story. It is a famous story, but most of the time it is taken out of context. When we tell our kids this story about Samuel hearing the voice of God, what is the lesson we want them to learn? Does this story teach us that we should listen for God's audible voice as God's normal way of speaking? No. The point of the story in context is exactly the opposite. The point is not that everybody can hear an audible voice from God. The point is that in a time when the voice of God was very rare, and there were few prophets, and even they rarely heard from God, and when the high priest himself was not hearing God's voice, God did speak to Samuel.

The point of chapter three is to show that Samuel is a prophet. Samuel did not hear God's voice because he had any special spiritual sensitivities. He was not listening for God's voice - he didn't even know it was God. Eli had to tell him that. Samuel heard God's voice because God had chosen Samuel to be a prophet. The lesson of chapter three is not that we should be like Samuel. The lesson of chapter three is that we should listen to Samuel. Eli and his house are rejected by God and Samuel is now chosen to be God's prophet and priest and king-maker. God takes a whole chapter to make it very emphatic that Samuel is His chosen prophet.

Military disaster

Apostasy – 4000 dead

In chapter four the camera pans back even further and you see the rest of the Titanic going down. It is hard to imagine a moment in Israel's history that is more horrible and desperate than what we read in chapter four. Israel goes to war against the Philistines and gets creamed. According to verse two 4000 Israelite soldiers died on the battlefield. Let that sink in for a moment – that is a staggering number. It is a lot more than were killed on 9/11. And Israel was a lot smaller nation than the United States is, so the proportional loss was really a lot more.

And the worst part is the Israelites have no idea why it happened. God had promised to take care of them and give them military victory in the Promised Land. They did not have a king, they did not have military leaders – they really did not even have a military. God had not set them up that way, because He wanted it to be clear that He was their deliverer. But He was not going to deliver them while they were rebelling against Him and worshipping idols. And so they lost, and did not know why.

Attempted manipulation of God – 30,000 dead

3 When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did Yahweh bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of Yahweh's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies."

They know they need God's help to win, so they turn to religion. They do not repent of their sins, they do not get rid of their idols, they do not seek God Himself, they do not even look to God to deliver them. They do not say, "Let's get the ark so God will be with us and save us," they say, "Let's

get the ark so it will be with us and save us.” Their religion had become so externalized and ritualized, that they did not concern themselves with what was in their hearts. Their religion was all about actions. In some ways they were like the modern Roman Catholics. That is not to say Catholics do not care about the heart – many Catholics do. But they also believe that there are religious rituals and actions that have their effect regardless of what is in your heart. Participation in the sacraments gives you grace from God just by doing them, regardless of what is in your heart. The Israelites thought just having that box would give them victory in battle. They did not care about God – they only cared about getting the military deliverance, and they were trying to use God to get what they wanted. That is very common. People use religion to try to manipulate God to do what they want instead of seeking what God wants.

But God will never, ever be manipulated. And if you try to manipulate Him you are not going to like the results.

⁴ So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of Yahweh Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. ⁵ When the ark of Yahweh's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook.

¹⁰ So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers.

That is another 11 9/11's. But that is not all.

¹¹ The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

The ark was where God had said He would reveal His presence to bless His people. So if the ark was gone, God was gone. And without Yahweh's protection and blessing, Israel really, really did not have anything going for them. A messenger came from the battle and reported to Eli.

17 "Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured." ¹⁸ When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had led Israel forty years.

Hearing that your two sons are dead is hard news. But hearing that the ark was captured – that is fatal news.

¹⁹ His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains. ²⁰ As she was dying, the women attending her said, "Don't despair; you have given birth to a son."

That is how much the people back then appreciated children. If you just got news that your husband and father both died and you were dying in childbirth, as long as the child was okay the normal thing would be for you to be happy.

20 ...But she did not respond or pay any attention. ²¹ She named the boy Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel"-- ... ²² She said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

By getting the ark they thought they were turning to God for help. And 30,000 died and the ark was captured. And what they have now is hopelessness with a capital H. Nothing like this had ever happened to Israel. That woman was right – God’s glory had departed. He had abandoned them and they were utterly helpless. Hannah’s little crisis in chapter one was nothing. The whole Titanic just went under.

Ups and Downs of Dagaon

Once the Philistines got the ark they thought they could use it for their advantage just like Israel tried to do. They captured the ark and so they thought they captured Israel’s God. So they put it in the temple with one of their gods, thinking, “Good, now we have that much more power.” What happens next is hilarious – to us; but terrifying to the Philistines. Spurgeon has a sermon on this chapter titled “The ups and downs of Dagon.” Yahweh keeps slamming him down on his face, and the Philistines keep propping him back up, until Yahweh decapitates him. They come in and find Dagon with his head and hands cut off. On top of that the people all get tumors, and a lot of them die. So they keep passing the ark from town to town until finally they realize they need to send it back to Israel.

70 more dead in Beth Shemesh

So they put it on a cart pulled by some cows that just leave their calves, and miraculously bring the ark back to Israel - mooing the whole time like they are being driven against their will. When the ark arrives back in Israel, at Beth Shemesh, there is a huge celebration. But that celebration is severely dampened when Yahweh kills 70 men for looking inside the ark.

The Ark of the Covenant is not just a box that you can do with as you please. Yahweh is a God of great mercy and great compassion and great tenderness and forgiveness and patience, but He will not be trifled with. The God of Israel will be taken seriously. So they send the ark off to another town where it stays for the next 20 years.

The rescue of the Titanic

In chapter seven that little rescue boat that pulled that one woman out of her little crisis now ends up saving the whole cruise ship. In chapter seven the people’s sorrow finally starts to bring them to actual repentance before God. We will return to chapter seven in detail later because repentance is a very important issue in Samuel. And it is crucial in the Christian life. We must understand how to respond to our own sin. Some of the commentators really scratch their heads over Saul and David, because from their point of view it seems like David’s sin was worse than Saul’s. And it seems like both men had the same kind of repentance. We see three big repentances in Samuel. First there is this national repentance in chapter seven; Then Saul’s inadequate repentance, and then David’s repentance. So we will look at those in detail. For now just understand that God responds with amazing deliverance and blessing in response to this repentance in chapter seven. The Philistines attack, the Israelites turn to God and rely completely on Him this time (instead of trying to use the ark)...

10 ...that day Yahweh thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. 11 The men of Israel rushed out of

Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Car.

13 So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again. Throughout Samuel's lifetime, the hand of Yahweh was against the Philistines. 14 The towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel were restored to her, and Israel delivered the neighboring territory from the power of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

Israel was in the most desperate straits imaginable. The Titanic was sinking fast, and the crew did not even know it – so there was no one to cry out to God for help. So how did God bring about their rescue? - By closing the womb of an obscure, hillbilly woman living with a cruel rival. God was willing to rescue them, but only in response to someone crying out to Him with fervent, persistent, earnest prayer - But not just any prayer. It had to be prayer that was a true seeking after God and not a using of God to get some gift that was seen as the ultimate source of joy. (And we know that is what Hannah was doing because she was fully satisfied prior to receiving the gift she was asking for.)

Application

You may be thinking, “Wow, I cannot believe Darrell just covered seven chapters in one lesson!” I didn’t cover seven chapters. I skipped seven chapters. My purpose is to begin a series on the life of David, and that starts in chapter 16. But my introduction to the first sermon is going to take a few weeks, because we have to understand the context. There are some very important spiritual lessons we can take from his section of Scripture.

1) Seek God; do not use God

The most important one is this: Seek God, do not use God. Seek Him as your highest treasure. Do not use Him to get some other treasure. There will be times when it seems like you absolutely have to have this certain earthly thing or person in order to have joy. You absolutely have to have this circumstance in order to have peace. And in times like that you will be driven to try to use God. Remember that God can give you all that your soul wants to get from that earthly treasure, and He can give it to you with or without using that earthly treasure. Do not be like the people in James four who did not get their prayers answered because they were asking for things for their own pleasures and not for the glory of God.

And be careful to never turn your walk with the Lord into a mechanized process in which you can control the results you get by what religious things you do. Sometimes we fall into this without even realizing it. We think reading our Bible every day is like doing pushups every day. If you do pushups every day you will get stronger – not matter how you feel about the pushups. Doing your devotions every day is not like that. Personal relationships do not have automatic outcomes just because you put in your time. You can faithfully take your wife out on a date night every week, but if you do not do things on those dates to cultivate intimacy, those very dates can drive you apart as a couple. God is a person, not a machine. And we must deal with Him in ways that fan the flames of love.

2) Remember the big picture

Keep in mind that the camera is always zoomed in tight from your perspective. Our human eyes are locked on macro. Hannah did not have any idea that her prayer in response to her little crisis was going to be what God used to do a national work, even a global work. The answer that God sent to

her prayer set in motion a rescue of all of humanity that will end in the glorious, eternal reign of the Son of David forever. When Joseph was sold into slavery and then delivered, God was accomplishing something much, much bigger than rescuing an individual man. When Job was afflicted something much, much bigger than Job's little life was going on in heaven. When that Jewish mother packed her little boy's lunch with some loaves and fishes, something much greater than a lunch was in the works. Be careful about calling anything in your life small. Without the wide angle, how could you possibly know if something is small or big?

When you feel overwhelmed by forces much bigger and much more powerful and out of your control, and you feel like a little mouse caught inside a huge machine, realize that you are in a huge machine, but you are not a mouse – you are a cog. You are a little gear, and the huge, massive, scary gears around you that are exerting force on you and turning you this way and that way, are under the direct control of the Designer of this machine and the whole machine is accomplishing His perfect work. Blessed be the God of the zoomed-in close-up and the wide angle, universal plan, and who accomplishes the one by means of the other. And that is not sometimes true. According to Romans 8:28, for the believer it is always true.

Sometimes we are tempted to question whether our suffering is out of proportion to the benefit. I have heard people say, "I know this is teaching me perseverance, but this is just too much." If you are ever tempted to think that, think of it this way: What would it take for you to put your child through what God is putting you through? How wonderful an outcome would there have to be before you would be willing to take your precious little child whom you love, and put him through the suffering that God is putting you through for years at a time - with no explanation for why? Would you put him through all that pain so that when he turned 16 he could have a \$100 savings bond? No way. Remember that God is all powerful – all it would take for Him to completely erase every trace of your pain right now would be a single thought. He could do that at any moment. And He loves you more than you love your own children. So how huge and awesome a benefit must there be that would cause God to be willing to just watch you suffer so profoundly for so long? Even for a relatively minor amount of pain there is no way God would be willing to go through watching you suffer unless there was absolutely, positively no other way, and the benefit was something absolutely indescribably delightful.

God gives us suffering because it is important. Had Pinninah been kind to Hannah, Samuel may never have been born. It was her vicious, merciless attack that drove Hannah to the throne of grace.³ The suffering had to be intense enough to drive her to God. Had it been suffering of a bearable magnitude, she probably would have just born it. If she had had an understanding, compassionate husband, she may have run to him instead of to God. Sometimes God has to cut off our access to every broken cistern before we will find our way to the Spring of living water.

3) Make God's glory the purpose of your request

When you pray for relief, make God's glory, not yourself the ultimate purpose of your request. Hannah wanted a son, but she did not make herself the purpose for Samuel's existence. The main purpose for her son would be the glory of God. And so it was no problem for her to make the vow she made that Samuel would be devoted to God and grow up in the Temple. If an answer came, that answer would be for God's glory. The child would belong to God, not to her. Never make your

³ The name "Samuel" is a play on words with the term "asked of God," and that term for asking of God is used over and over in this text. There is a strong emphasis on the fact that Samuel came as a result of asking.

personal gratification the dead end of what you are praying for. Not only will that kill your joy, but it will give God no reason to answer your prayers.

Benediction: Ro 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" 35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Devotionals

Deliverance

1 Samuel 1 (God's deliverance), Day 1

The birth of Samuel comes at a time of desperate spiritual need in Israel. It is the end of the period of the Judges, which marked a decent into wickedness so extreme that it is hard to even read the book of Judges. And soon to come in 1 Samuel will be the description of the terrible domination of the Philistines over Israel. Israel is in desperate, desperate need of a deliverer.

But the announcement of the birth of that deliverer is described not in terms of the nation's and the world's need for him, but rather in terms of his mother's need for him. Samuel was born as the result of the cries of a brokenhearted, barren woman who simply wanted a son.

Dear Father in heaven, Giver of good gifts to the world and to me, I love the way You supplied Israel's need for a deliverer. You didn't tell Hannah, "I can't concern myself with the desires of one, obscure barren woman who wants a child. I have national and global and universal interests to concern myself with." Instead You achieved Your national, global, universal and eternal purposes by satisfying the desires of a lowly, afflicted woman in ancient Israel who cried out to You for help. You didn't do that by stepping aside from Your larger concerns to help her, but You made Your help for her Your way of delivering Israel. How grand and glorious, and at the same time how individual and tender are Your works, Oh God of hosts! You concern Yourself with the tiny, minute desires of the afflicted, while accomplishing eternal purposes in your attention to some individual need or desire. The galactic span between the desires of a Hebrew woman and the eternal redemptive purposes for all of humanity and Your grand Kingdom – that span of light-years fits easily within the reach of Your powerful and loving arms. Thank You, dear Lord, that my highest good never has to be sacrificed for the greater good of the Kingdom! What an amazing thing. It would be the most reasonable thing in the world if I did have to set aside my best interests for the good of the Kingdom from time to time; yet in Your amazing love You have made it so that will never have to happen. I bless Your great name, dear God! Thank You for listening to the tiny squeaks of need that come from my heart. Thank You that You hear the desires of the afflicted, You strengthen their hearts, and You listen attentively to them – all the while keeping Your omnipotent hand firmly on the wheel of the creation and Your eternal plan.

Thank You, dear God, for the personal ways in which You accomplish Your great purposes. For the deliverer to come, it evidently required fervent, earnest, persistent prayer. And it took the deep pain of Hannah's situation to generate that kind of prayer. Oh, the blessedness of

Hannah living in a painful marriage situation with a wicked, cruel rival wife mocking her barrenness, which was caused by You. Had it not been for all that pain, she likely would not have cried out to You with the fervency required to bring the wonderful answer that came and ended up being a blessing for all humanity. Oh Lord, teach me to pray fervently!

1 Samuel 1:7-18 Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat.

¹⁰ In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD.

16 I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. ¹⁶ Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief." ¹⁷ Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." ¹⁸ She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

What a sweet and beautiful picture of how You comfort the afflicted. She was so upset over her childlessness and over the abuse of her enemy that she couldn't even eat. Then she came and "poured out her heart" to You, and went away happy and no longer downcast and with a restored appetite and ability to enjoy food – even though she still didn't have any children and still had the same painful home situation. Nothing had changed except for her encounter with You in Your house. The joy that seemed like it could only come through circumstances came without circumstances changing. You, dear God, are capable of giving joy and satisfaction of soul apart from circumstances. Thank You, dear Father, for Your promise to do that! Oh Lord, may I seek hard after You. Let all my desires drive me to You, never from You. When I decide to postpone or skip my prayer time in a time when I don't have to postpone or skip it, it is because I want something – I want the benefits that I anticipate coming from whatever it is I chose to do instead. Oh Lord, please teach my soul that whatever it desires it should seek by approaching You, not through some other means. Oh God, let me never prefer getting my work done or anything else to spending time with You. Give Your servant the faith to expect that if I spend time with You and experience Your presence I will go away with the joy and peace that Hannah enjoyed – even before You granted her the son she so wanted.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: Initiation of and responsiveness to prayers for deliverance

Promise to trust: He will work in my heart to draw me to pray and then answer my prayers

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Greater love and desire for God (and all those He loves), Motivation, Experiential knowledge of the love that surpasses knowledge, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

Deliverance

1 Samuel 1 (God's deliverance), Day 2

1 Samuel 2:1-36 Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. ² "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. ³ "Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. ⁴ "The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. ⁵ Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away. ⁶ "The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. ⁷ The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. ⁸ He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. "For the foundations of the earth are the LORD's; upon them he has set the world. ⁹ He will guard the feet of his saints, but the wicked will be silenced in darkness. "It is not by strength that one prevails; ¹⁰ those who oppose the LORD will be shattered. He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."

The fact that Hannah found her joy in the Lord and not ultimately in the Lord's gift of a son is seen in the fact that her joy returned after her time of prayer but prior to her becoming pregnant. It is seen even more vividly in her psalm. Her **heart rejoices in the LORD**. Throughout the entire psalm she never even mentions her son once. She does make one indirect reference to the idea of having children (v.5), but no reference at all to Samuel. We might have expected a psalm that went on and on about how wonderful it is going to be now to have a son, how delightful it is to hold him and to nurse him, or the fact that now there will be an heir by her. But there is none of that. She speaks about the LORD, not the gift. Her rejoicing came from the LORD, not the gift.

We might have expected that Hannah would be sad to have to fulfill her vow. She must have had such a deep, profound love for Samuel, and to give him up right after he was weaned, to have an "empty nest" just a few years after giving birth – you would think that would be an occasion for sorrow rather than great joy. But Hannah was full of joy, because her joy didn't come from Samuel; it came from God.

Dear Father in heaven, Giver of all good gifts, You alone are able to give joy. And You are not dependent upon any gift to do so. You would make Hannah's heart happy even with an empty house. You could make my heart happy even with an empty house. You don't need anything to assist in Your work of making my heart happy. You could do it without all these possessions, without my family or friends, without my health, without my job. You, Oh God, are enough to fully satisfy my soul, just as You were enough to satisfy the soul of Hannah.

Dear Father, if I truly believed this Oh how earnestly I would seek after You! If I had a winning lottery ticket and misplaced it somewhere in my house, I would search with unbounded earnestness and persistence as a first priority to find it. If my heart were really convinced that being in Your presence can give my heart greater joy than ten million dollars, how often would people see my lips moving as I lose myself in pouring out my heart to You in

Your presence as Hannah did. Please, dear God, help me take some steps toward that today. Help me believe! Please, dear God, give me a taste of Hannah's joy now, before I'm finished with this time with You this morning. Give me enough of a taste to whet my appetite for the rest of the day. Let me be able this evening when I go to bed to look back on this morning with delightful, fond memory. Let me be able to savor the taste of the delicacies from Your table that You have in Your heart to give me during this prayer time, so that I can enjoy them all through the day today – like when some wonderful thing happens and all day long my soul delights in rehearsing it over and over because it was so enjoyable.

Hannah's prayer resulted in the birth of Samuel, who delivered Your people from the Philistines and led them back to You. How many are in heaven now who would not have otherwise been in heaven, all because of the birth of that child? So much amazing blessing resulted from such fervent prayer, and the fervency arose from such anguish. Hannah gave birth twice. Just as the joy of having a child comes only as a result of the intense agony of labor, so it was with Hannah's prayer. Let it be so with my prayers.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: Ability to satisfy the soul with His very presence alone

Promise to trust: He will satisfy my soul if I seek Him and not other satisfactions

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Gladness and joy, Greater love and desire for God (and all those He loves), Pleasure, Encouragement and comfort, Rest and refreshment, like water to a tree, Restoration, Fullness and satisfaction

Deliverance

1 Samuel 1 (God's deliverance), Day 3

1 Samuel 4:2 Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield. ³ When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies."

¹⁰ So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. ¹¹ The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

5:1 After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ² Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon. ³ When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD!

6 The LORD's hand was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation upon them and afflicted them with tumors.

7:2 all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the LORD. ³ And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid

yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." 4 So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only. 5 Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with the LORD for you." 6 When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah.

8 They said to Samuel, "Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines."

The first time the Israelites expected God to give them victory even though they hadn't repented or put away their idols. And when they lost, they went to get the ark so that "it" would save them. They cared nothing about God and did not even seek deliverance from Him. They just wanted to use religion to accomplish what they wanted to accomplish. The result was disaster – 30,000 dead. The Philistines thought they had captured something useful when they captured the ark, but it was a disaster for them too – not because the ark was anything, but because God's had was heavy upon them.

But then when the people repented of their sin and turned wholeheartedly to God and put away their idols and confessed their sin and sought intercession from God's priest and sought deliverance not from the ark but from God Himself; He delivered them.

Using God results in disaster; Seeking God results in blessing.

Dear Father, are there any areas in my life where I am trying to use You instead of seek You – where getting the thing I want is a higher priority in my heart than fellowship with You? If there are, please open my eyes to them that I might repent. Let me never turn prayer into a good luck charm. Remind me always, dear Lord, that when I pray I am seeking closeness with a Person. And that closeness is more to be desired than the thing I am asking for.

God can not be manipulated. He does what He pleases. It is true that He always acts consistently with His character and promises, but even there, He is not controlled like a vending machine. If the promise is "Seek me and you will find me" and we seek Him, still it is up to Him when and where and under what circumstances He fulfills that promise. He may fulfill it within an hour; or He may decide you need to seek Him for a week or a month before He reveals His presence in a greater way. He is God, and He is never controlled or manipulated by people. When we try to manipulate Him it is a very serious sin. In doing that we are elevating ourselves to a status above Him. By seeking to use Him to accomplish our ends instead of seeking Him for His sake, we assume that our ends are more important than His.

Father, my puny little plans are worthless unless they match the plans of Your heart. Please forgive me, dear Lord, for the many times when I so frequently get tunnel vision on my own plans and desires and begin acting as though they are what are most important. I get so wrapped up in my meaningless plans that I get angry when Your plans interfere! I plan to get somewhere by a certain time, Your plan includes a big traffic jam that makes me late, and I

get angry – as though my plan were more important than Yours!!! Oh forgive my arrogance and pride and self-importance, exalting my own desires above those of the eternal sovereign! Teach me to love the plans of Your heart, so that all my prayers are prayers that are consistent with Your plans, never in opposition. When I pray, “Nevertheless Your will be done” let that prayer rise out of a real, genuine love for Your will above my own.

Thank You, dear Father, that I can trust in the goodness of Your plan. When I hit a traffic jam or a sickness or a loss or any kind of suffering I can know with complete certainty that You are carrying out Your perfect plan, which is in my best interests. Teach me, dear God, to love that.

And teach me to love the fact that Your purposes are higher and better than mine. Remind me that if I just seek You instead of all the things I desire in this world, that You promise You will give me that which my soul was seeking from those things. You may use those things or You may not, but either way my soul will get what it really wanted – not the things, but the joy, peace, satisfaction, delight, etc. that it expected to come from those things. Dear God, this is such an amazing promise! Please, teach me to be more aware of it today all through the day that I might rejoice in it all day long.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God whose presence fulfills the desires of my soul

Promise to trust: He will give me the things my soul thinks it will get from all the earthly delights it desires if I seek them from Him rather than from the earthly delights.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Gladness and joy, Greater love and desire for God (and all those He loves), Safety and protection, Peace and calmness, A joyful, willing heart, Pleasure, Encouragement and comfort, Rest and refreshment, like water to a tree, Restoration, Guidance and clarity with regard to direction, Confidence, courage, and comfort, Honor and vindication, Fullness and satisfaction, A sense of being attended to and cared for, Hope and rest, Renewal and transformation, Strength, Motivation, Enlightenment, A greater abiding presence of Christ in the heart, Experiential knowledge of the love that surpasses knowledge, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

Deliverance

1 Samuel 1 (God’s deliverance), Day 4

1 Sam.1:5-6 But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and Yahweh had closed her womb. ⁶ And because Yahweh had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her.

15-17 "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to Yahweh. ¹⁶ Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

¹⁷ Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

**¹⁹ Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before Yahweh and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and Yahweh remembered her. ²⁰ So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel
7:13 So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again. Throughout Samuel's lifetime, the hand of Yahweh was against the Philistines.**

During the lifetime of Samuel the LORD provided a wonderful period of blessing and peace and protection for Israel, which had to have been especially delightful since the previous period was the time of incredible disaster for Israel. The story of Samuel is the story of how God took the initiative to rescue His people from that horrible, disastrous condition and bring blessing and deliverance. And that story starts with the LORD closing Hannah's womb.

The summary of God's plan is seen in the underlined portions above:

**1:5 Yahweh had closed her womb. ... 16 I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief." ... 19 Yahweh remembered her. ... 20 Hannah conceived and gave birth to ... Samuel
7:13 Throughout Samuel's lifetime, the hand of Yahweh was against the Philistines.**

Had Pinninah been kind to Hannah, Samuel may never have been born. It was her vicious, merciless attack that drove Hannah to the throne of grace. The very element that aggravated her trial was that which led to her triumph, and the triumph of God's grand purpose for the whole nation.

Good morning dear Lord God,

Your plan to deliver and bless the nation began by inflicting excruciating pain on one of the rare godly people in Israel for a long period of time – enough pain to cause her to cry out to You in earnest.

Father, no one who knows You is surprised to read that after her time of earnestly seeking You in Your Temple Hannah went away encouraged and with a restored appetite. It is no shock when we read about Your wonderful, rich, bountiful answer to her prayer – giving her numerous children, including the child who would be Your tool to lead Israel back to You in repentance so You could bless them. Nor is it any surprise to read that your dealings with her were a key part of a much, much bigger plan that You carried out in glorious wisdom. All that is fairly routine and so much to be expected in Your Word that at times I have even found myself bored reading stories like this in Your Word because of how predictable they are. So if it is that predictable that You would comfort, encourage, strengthen, bless, and fill with joy the woman who cries out to you in earnest prayer, why is it not my practice to cry out to You in much greater earnest than I do? If all this is so predictable when I read accounts of Your actions in Your Word, which I claim to believe; why are all these same things so far from my mind when I encounter suffering?

Oh Lord, help me to respond to Your workings in my life the same way I respond when I read the beginning of a Bible story; When some suffering comes, in stead of thinking, "Shoot! What a bad break! Why does this kind of thing always happen to me!" let me think, "Oh, another one of these stories about God. I know what's going to happen – these stories are all the same. God is afflicting Darrell, Darrell will cry out to God in earnest prayer for deliverance, God will respond with blessing beyond anything Darrell imagined, and some marvelous aspect of God's plan that is a thousand times bigger than Darrell's little situation will be accomplished to the glory of the blessed name of the Living God."

Teach me to read my life, dear God, the way I read the Bible – seeing You at work and assuming You will act as You always have acted. And teach me to especially think this way when it comes to affliction. Joseph's affliction was Your plan to save the nation of Israel from starvation. Job's affliction was part of a demonstration of Your worthiness in a conflict with Satan in heaven. Daniel's affliction set up the demonstration of Your awesome power. Nehemiah's affliction brought about the rebuilding of the Temple. Mary and Joseph's affliction turned out to be the greatest blessing ever known. The affliction that made the women weep at the empty tomb turned out to be the blessing that brought salvation to all who have faith in You. The affliction of Your people in Acts brought the gospel to the whole world. Father, why would I ever assume my affliction is just meaningless, purposeless, empty, useless pain? Teach me, dear Lord, to read Your providential workings in my life the same way I read the Bible – assuming Your perfect hand to be at work and delighting in it.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: Deliverance

Promise to trust: He will

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Gladness and joy, Greater love and desire for God (and all those He loves), Safety and protection, Peace and calmness, A joyful, willing heart, Pleasure, Encouragement and comfort, Rest and refreshment, like water to a tree, Restoration, Guidance and clarity with regard to direction, Confidence, courage, and comfort, Honor and vindication, Fullness and satisfaction, A sense of being attended to and cared for, Hope and rest, Renewal and transformation, Strength, Motivation, Enlightenment, A greater abiding presence of Christ in the heart, Experiential knowledge of the love that surpasses knowledge, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

Deliverance

1 Samuel 1 (God's deliverance), Day 5

1 Samuel 2:1-10 Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. ² "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. ³ "Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance,

for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed. ⁴ "The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. ⁵ Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away. ⁶ "The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. ⁷ The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. ⁸ He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. "For the foundations of the earth are the LORD's; upon them he has set the world. ⁹ He will guard the feet of his saints, but the wicked will be silenced in darkness. "It is not by strength that one prevails; ¹⁰ those who oppose the LORD will be shattered. He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."

Good morning Dear Father,

My heart rejoices in You this morning. The other day when a cool breeze blew through my car window and gave me a feeling of such joy and pleasure – dear Lord, only Your presence can do that. A thousand times a breeze has touched my face but not my soul. But this breeze came with Your presence. O thank You, dear Lord, that Your presence is so sweet, and that You have revealed Your presence to Your servant! My heart rejoices in the LORD.

"My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance.

I rejoice because of Your goodness to me. You lift up my horn. You uphold my dignity. All my sins and weaknesses stand as a mountain of shame, and yet You level that great mount with glory. You have bestowed upon me a measure of Your own nature – You have given me some love, weak as it is, it is real love for You. You have given me a measure of kindness and humility and strength and knowledge and joy in You. You have gifted me and called me into Your service, and You have answered my prayers. You are my glory; the lifter of my head.

² "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

I rejoice because of Your uniqueness. There is no other God besides You. Even in that ancient, polytheistic culture it was obvious that there was none like You. Dagon was nothing like You. Baal was as different from You as night from day. No god of the pagans is holy. Allah is guilty of sin. Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva all three combined fall short of righteousness. There is no one holy like You. There is no darkness in You. Not even a faint shadow. You are pure goodness and righteousness.

And there is no other rock. There is no refuge of safety and source of strength besides You. No one and nothing can serve as a solid foundation beneath my feet – only You.

Oh what a joy it is to go through life knowing the only holy, strong rock of salvation!

³ "Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed.

I rejoice because of Your knowledge and judgment. You know all things. Nothing – not even a tinge of a mixed motive that lasts 1/100th of a second in the heart of a lone person in a remote jungle escapes Your penetrating and clear gaze. You are fooled by no deceit, put off by no excuse. Your assessment of the level of evil or goodness and the genuineness of repentance is impeccable. No injustice will fail to be made right by You.

⁴ "The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength. ⁵ Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away.

I rejoice because of Your care for the weak and afflicted, and Your power over the strong. It is such a terror to be subject to enemies too powerful for me without any recourse. Oh, what a comfort to my soul to know that the Almighty Lord of armies is for me, and is my own dear Father and Friend, and He has promised to take care of me! You replace my barrenness with fullness. And what bareness that still remains is living on borrowed time. Those fruitless, dry branches on this tree will someday be heavy with fruit.

⁶ "The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up. ⁷ The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. ⁸ He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. "For the foundations of the earth are the LORD's; upon them he has set the world. ⁹ He will guard the feet of his saints, but the wicked will be silenced in darkness. "It is not by strength that one prevails; ¹⁰ those who oppose the LORD will be shattered. He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth. "He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."

I rejoice because of Your sovereignty. You are the great and mighty and only King of the universe. You reign over all! There is no maverick molecule anywhere in the Cosmos over which You do not say, "Mine!" and over which You do not have full control. You decide everything – even the outcome of human decision making. The day of my death is written in Your book, and the ink is as dry as the entry on the day of my birth. I will be sick or well, rich or poor, strong or weak, alive or dead according to Your perfect pleasure; and Your pleasure is my pleasure.

My heart rejoices – Oh how it rejoices – my heart rejoices in the LORD my God. Forgive me, dear Lord, that I don't rejoice more. Overlook the dullness of my affections and don't punish me for my tepid love and delight. Change me. Give me greater, deeper love. Fill my cup with greater joy in You that I might glorify You with my delight. Open my eyes to these attributes that my cup might overflow.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: goodness, uniqueness, holiness, knowledge, judgment, justice, compassion, care, and sovereignty

Promise to trust: He will exercise all of those on my behalf and delight my soul with them.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Gladness and joy, Greater love and desire for God (and all those He loves), Safety and protection, Peace and

calmness, A joyful, willing heart, Pleasure, Encouragement and comfort, Rest and refreshment, like water to a tree, Restoration, Guidance and clarity with regard to direction, Confidence, courage, and comfort, Honor and vindication, Fullness and satisfaction, A sense of being attended to and cared for, Hope and rest, Renewal and transformation, Strength, Motivation, Enlightenment, A greater abiding presence of Christ in the heart, Experiential knowledge of the love that surpasses knowledge, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey