

If you work hard enough and apply yourself; you’ll be successful. That may be true in certain situations. We invest our time and do the best we can and hopefully end up with a positive result. But what happens when things don’t turn out? Is it our fault? That also may be true in certain situations.

What about when it comes to raising children? God blesses us with the gift of a child. We get them baptized. We bring them to church. We make sure they go to Sunday School and VBS and maybe even attend a Lutheran Elementary School. We try to provide a good example at home. But sometimes, lo and behold, things don’t turn out. One of our kids gets hooked on drugs or alcohol, or runs with the wrong crowd and gets in trouble with the law. Is it our fault as a parent?

If we always followed that line of thinking, then it was also our Savior’s fault that Judas betrayed him, and that Peter denied even knowing him. Both had been with Jesus for 3 years of instruction.

Obviously, it wasn’t Jesus’ fault. He was the perfect teacher and yet, one of his followers betrayed him and took his own life, while another swore up and down he didn’t know him.

Judas and Peter made those choices. It wasn’t Jesus’ fault. As Christians we need to understand this truth so that we don’t continue to blame others, or ourselves for choices and decisions that children make, or have made which were beyond our control as a parent.

And yet, it still does matter what a parent does in raising a child. Proverbs reminds us of a parent’s impact: **“Teach a youth about the way they should go; even when they are old, they will not depart from it.”** In today’s world, it’s easy to lose sight of what has lasting value and significance. The most important legacy that you can leave your children is that you brought them to Jesus.

Elkanah, Samuel’s father, was a dad who took his spiritual responsibilities seriously. Although Jewish law required only that the males in a family attend the festivals at the tabernacle located at Shiloh, Elkanah took his whole family with him.

Speaking of family, even when a dad takes his spiritual responsibilities seriously, there are still going to be problems and even dysfunction. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Both were competing for his love and attention. Some argue that in OT times God must have overlooked having more than one wife. Abraham and Jacob, David and Solomon all had more than one wife. What they forget is that Jesus quoted the OT, when he stated that in marriage: **“two will become one flesh.”**

The worst times for Elkanah’s wife, Hannah, must have been those festival days. When families gather, they always discuss family life and compare kids. Elkanah’s other wife, the not-so-nice Peninnah, brought Hannah to tears by constantly harping on her infertility. How painful for Hannah to sit by herself while Peninnah and Elkanah’s children played. Elkanah did give Hannah special attention to show her that he loved her. He tried to cheer her up but it didn’t work.

We too can feel left out, even rejected, as though nobody loves us or understands. And, while many don’t understand, but there is always one who does. Hannah was sure God understood. She wanted a son in the worst way, so she took it to the Lord in prayer. Did her prayer go something like this: *“God, it’s been so long. Peninnah says mean things all the time. I don’t know how much more I can take?”*

To add insult to injury, Eli, the high priest, mistakenly thought that because he saw Hannah’s lips moving but couldn’t hear her voice, she must be drunk. In reality, it was her intense and heartfelt prayer. She firmly believed in God’s ability to give her a son.

She follows up her emotional prayer with an extraordinary promise: *“Lord, if you give me a son, I’ll give him back to you.”* Can you imagine doing that? All the years of heartache, and then she’s willing to turn around and gives him back? Talk about a selfless prayer.

Hannah left that day knowing she could do nothing more or better than to hand over everything to the

Lord. It's true, "*prayer changes people.*" Her anxiety and sadness were replaced with a cheerful and positive outlook.

Hannah's confidence in the Lord was not misplaced. Our lesson used this interesting phrase: "**The Lord remembered her.**" That expression doesn't mean God had forgotten about her, but rather that he now made his loving care toward her evident and obvious. Hannah's level of joy had to be off-the-charts when she realized she was pregnant and then again when she gave birth. "*Samuel,*" the name they would give their son, which means "*God has heard,*" would be a constant reminder to everyone that God does exactly what he promises. Hannah teaches us: "*Don't give up on prayer! Continue to believe in the power of the Lord!*"

Hannah was determined to follow through on her promise. She cherished those few early years she had with her son. Who says the early years of a child's life aren't important?

Research has found that 85% of a person's brain is developed by the time they are 5 years old! If the first 5 years of life are critical to a child's physical development and mental health, those same years are even more important to a child's spiritual health and development.

Much of what Samuel learned and the character he developed he received from his mom. When Samuel was 5 or 6 years old, his parents took him to Shiloh and presented him to the Lord. As a grateful mother stood before Eli with her son, Eli must have felt a little awkward after his comments to Hannah years earlier.

Hannah was doing what every godly parent needs to do. When we pray to become parents, part of that prayer needs to be a promise to dedicate them to the Lord. We do that at their baptism. We're responding to this blessing from the Lord by caring for them, loving them and bringing them to Jesus as we raise them.

Like most boys his age, Samuel would outgrow his clothes. That's why Hannah made a new coat for him every year and delivered it when she visited. Those yearly visits to see her son were bitter-

sweet. Blessed and proud to see him in the Lord's service, but he wasn't at home with his parents.

Samuel is an example of the blessings of training a child when they're young. We're told that young Samuel "**grew up in the presence of the Lord.**" He grew taller. He grew in favor with the Lord. He grew in faith so he could be the leader, the prophet, Israel needed him to be.

If we, as Christ's followers, are going to be faithful in serving God, then we too need to continue to grow and mature in our faith and life. That happens by worshiping regularly, studying the scriptures, praying and sharing Jesus with others.

The story of Hannah and Samuel makes us think of the how and why God answers prayers the way he does. Sometimes we pray for something for a long time. We can't figure out why the Lord isn't answering our prayers in having a child, in finding a house, in getting a job, in feeling better.

Here are some reasons God doesn't always answer our prayers when and how we'd like.

- 1) Typically, we cherish something more when we have to wait for it. Is that the lesson God is teaching?
  - 2) God wants to use us to help someone else. Think of the years Joseph spent in prison in Egypt, before the Lord answered his prayer for deliverance, and was able to save so many.
  - 3) God is doing work in you before he lifts the burden. He wanted Hannah and Abraham to grow in their dependence on him before answering their prayers for children.
  - 4) God uses it so we continually call on him. The more often we approach God's throne, the more our reliance grows and the more glory God receives.
- It's Bible Stories like this that reminds us, whether we're parents or not, not to give up on prayer and leave it in God's hands and trust his timing.
  - It's Bible Stories like this that reminds us as parents that our children, gifts from God's, need to be introduced to the Lord at a young age.