

Samuel: A Ministry Of Prayer

Prayer time in hell...

Last week some of our college students did an excellent job teaching us how Hannah turned her bitterness into a blessing by the power of prayer. She was so distraught that she prayed and wept and looked as if she was drunk. She had just one request: that she could have a baby. She promised God that if she were to have a baby she would dedicate him to the Lord. God heard her prayer and she gave birth to a boy named Samuel and when he was young she dropped him off to live at the tabernacle with Eli the priest.

When we think of the great prayer heroes of the bible we may not immediately think of Samuel but he certainly inherited his mother's passion for prayer! In fact his name means, "asked of God" - his name is "prayer"! Imagine that- every time you introduced yourself you would be reminded that you are an answer to prayer.

Acts 3:24 tells us that he was the *first* of many prophets to predict the coming of Christ's kingdom.

Acts 13:20 tells us that he was the *last* of the judges or leaders of Israel before Israel had a king. In fact, he appointed Israel's first two kings- Saul and David.

He is so important that he bridges two eras in Israel's history that add up to almost 1000 years: The judges and the prophets. Only Samuel was both. We'll soon see that prayer was the key reason he could be such a powerful leader.

Psalms 99 In this short list of great leaders of the Old Testament, only 4 people are mentioned and Samuel is singled out for calling on the name of the Lord. He was known for praying.

In Jeremiah 15:1, God tells Jeremiah that he is so upset with the idolatry of his people and so set on his judgment that, "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people." That is a brutal passage. It also ranks Samuel in the top two most powerful men of God and men of prayer in the Old Testament. We have a lot to learn about prayer from Samuel.

Are you ready?!

(Oh yeah, there are also two books in the bible named after him! Let's turn to 1 Samuel)

1) Learning to Listen to God

1 Samuel 3:1-14

Later on Eli asks Samuel what God had said - awkward! (He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.)

May it never be said that the word of the Lord and visions are rare among us!

We think of prayer as talking to God, but prayer is a conversation. It's supposed to go two ways. It's so hard when someone talks too much. [Act Out: You just try to get a word in but they just keep on going]

How many of us do all of the talking in our relationship with God? Talking to God is the easier part of prayer. Listening for the answer is a skill we need to learn. We may need the help of a more experienced mentor in the faith like Eli. But I hope that God's not waiting to interject in the one way conversation you've been having with him.

Moses understood this: At the shore of the Red Sea with the Egyptian army bearing down on them, the people launched into a one sided complaint about Moses and God's leadership. Moses told them, "The Lord will fight for you, you need only to be still."

Are we not seeing answers to our prayers because we are too busy answering them ourselves? We have to listen and wait and be patient and still. Sometimes that is so much more difficult than working out our own solution.

Eli teaches Samuel how to listen to God- we can copy and paste this sentence into our prayers: "Speak, for your servant is listening." I know it may be awkward at first but I want you to work this into your next quality prayer time. Talk to God and tell him what's going on and then say, "Speak, for your servant is listening," and be silent for 5 minutes. Listen to your thoughts. Let your mind go. Learn to listen to God.

2) Prayer wins battles against sin

Israel was in bad shape before Samuel came on the scene. They worshipped all kinds of idols and forgot about God so God gave them over to a foreign nation named Philistia. In 1 Samuel 7 we see that Israel decides to repent and return to God.

Maybe some of us today, before we came or during the worship or communion have decided to repent. Maybe you've recognized that God is missing in some part of your life and your way isn't working. I applaud you for making such a bold decision but I must inform you that you've invited a battle into your life. Satan doesn't want us to change and return to God.

1 Samuel 7:3-12

The Philistines saw that Israel was gathering and figured they wanted to go to war. I love the subheading of this passage: "Samuel subdues the Philistines." That's one man defeating an entire nation all by the power of prayer.

If your decision to change is going to go beyond being a mere decision you are going to need to pray. You are going to need Samuels in your life to pray for you. You can't defeat the sin on your own or it wouldn't even be an issue. We need to pray for the Lord to fight for us. Then we'll be able to look back at our lives and see all the changes we've made and sin we've overcome and not pat ourselves on the back but humbly repeat the words of Samuel, "Thus far the Lord has helped me."

Let's be praying for Lansing, Michigan, the US, Cyprus and India. Samuel was one man but his prayer changed his entire nation. You can't know how much impact your prayer can have.

3) Prayer puts our security in God

In 1 Samuel 8, Israel asks for a king. They wanted someone who could lead them into battle. They were tired of getting beat up by all the other nations. They thought that having a king would give them security. We do the same thing. We save our money, we lock our doors, we monitor our health so that we can be secure. Nobody wants to live a life of fear and worry. There is nothing wrong with those things and there was nothing wrong with Israel getting a king- God granted it after all. But there is something very wrong when we seek to get our security from things in this world instead of our God.

Saul gets anointed and Israel immediately starts to put their hope in him instead of God - he's a huge, beautiful man - he looks like an amazing king. At the sight of him the nations would probably cower. In this next passage we get to see their true heart in asking for a king:

1 Samuel 12:12-25

It's not thunderstorm season. It's a clear day- not a cloud in the sky. Samuel is trying to convey an important message to the people. You got the king you asked for but all of the power and security you desire is still in God's hands. So Samuel summons a thunderstorm through prayer and the people stand in awe. They realized their sin and in their desire to repent they asked Samuel to pray for them.

Has God been sending you thunderstorms on clear days? What has God been doing in your life to show you that he is the only source of security? What will it take for you to listen and recognize his power and rely on him alone?

I bet if we look back at many of the hardships and setbacks in our lives, we can see God there calling us to learn lessons about trust and sovereignty. When Job struggled with understanding

the brutal hardships he was facing it says that God answered him out of the storm. Wasn't it a storm on the sea of Galilee that taught the disciples that Jesus was truly in charge?

The people respond to the thunderstorm by repenting and asking for prayers. Then Samuel says one of the most important sentences in the bible regarding prayer: "Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you."

4) Never fail to pray - Start a ministry of prayer

This one sentence sums up the mindset of Samuel that made him a prayer hero. "Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you."

What if this was our heart?

I have to confess, that there are times when people come up to me and ask for prayer or text me to pray, that I fail to pray. I feel so bad about it, I sin against them and I sin against the person they are asking me to pray for. But according to Samuel I also sin against God himself when I fail to pray!

Prayer is not just a good idea. It is not an optional Christian activity. It is commanded: 1 Timothy 2:1-4 (petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving made for all people). When we let people down by failing to pray, we let God down.

I have good news! We can stop failing today! We can each start a ministry of prayer. A ministry is like a small Christian business. It's a non-profit and for prophet all at the same time. It's an area where you've decided to be a servant. We have all kinds of ministries in the church- kid's church, cleaning crew, HOPE and many more. Maybe you serve in one or more of those ministries. There is one ministry that you must start serving in today. There's no sign up sheet- you signed up when you got baptized - you are a member of the ministry of prayer!

So it's time to start praying! Here are some areas in the ministry of prayer that we cannot fail to pray about:

- For our families

Hannah was a woman of prayer, placed her son in a place of prayer, and he became a man of prayer. We need to raise our children in church and in a house of prayer (your house).

Train Samuels and Sam-anthas from birth.

Unfortunately, as great as Samuel was, he was more like Eli when it came to parenting instead of being like his mom. His sons, I'm ashamed to even say their names, Joel and Abijah, took bribes and became corrupt. They were one of the reasons that Israel asked for a king.

I have awesome parents. I know that they prayed for me all the time when I was growing up. My mom told me that she was praying for me all the time - she had a ministry of prayer dedicated to me! You may not be a perfect parent but you can be a praying parent. We can't fail our children by failing to pray for them and with them all throughout their lives.

- For the lost

The next ministry of prayer that we need to make a part of our lifestyle is for the lost. We were in the UP last week and Russell was telling his conversion story from his perspective. Doug and I asked him to come to church and study the bible for about five years. He saw our persistence. One day he had this experience while he was driving where he felt like Jesus was sitting right next to him in his truck and he believed that God was real. That's what Russ saw.

What Russ didn't see was especially Doug's prayers for Russ - for 5 years he prayed for Russ to become a follower of Jesus. We think it sounds crazy that a person could pray and conjure up a thunderstorm. How about Doug praying for Russ and Jesus himself responding to the prayer and going for a drive?

Russ was totally closed to Christ and now he leads a house church in Eaton Rapids. Our ministry of prayer for the lost needs to be filled with all kinds of people, not just people that we might think are open. It's the closed people that really need our prayers! Make a list and begin your ministry of prayer today.

- For the church and for leadership

This is a ministry of prayer that we need and especially I need. I ask you guys for prayer a lot, especially before I go to the UP or if I'm wrestling with big decisions about the direction of the church but I need your prayers and all of the leaders in the church desperately need your prayers all the time.

There is a famous story of the great 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon who would often ask the 6000 members of his congregation to stay home so new people could come and hear the word. One day as 6000 were gathered someone asked the secret of Spurgeon's success. The man was led to the basement of the church where 400 people were praying for him as he preached the word. The only reason I've seen any blessing as a church leader is because I've been prayed for. Thank you. Please don't fail me, this church, or our God by failing to pray for me as much as you can. When I pray for myself I simply ask God for wisdom and humility. I never want one without the other. I heard Ariel pray that exact prayer for me the other day. Please join me in that prayer.

Close: [With growing passion]

Brothers and sisters we've got work to do.

It's the kind of work that changes hearts and conjures up storms and reorients our trust and wins battles against sin and sees our kids and neighbors saved and sees our church continue to grow.

All of those things are our work- our ministry, our Christian business.

But this work has no tools, there's no punch card, there's no pay.

This work isn't even done with our hands.

It's done on our knees, it's done walking in the woods with the Lord, it's done when we wake up in the morning and before we turn the lights out at night.

As we've said a few times during this series, it's the work that Jesus is doing right now in heaven as he always lives to intercede for us.

Will you join with me, will you work next to Samuel, will you continue the prayer ministry of Jesus himself?

We all fail in many ways - but may we never fail to pray!

ATGBTG