

Messages from Heavenly Teachers 109-121

(Typed by CQ)

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--As told by Hanna, mother of Samuel

Philip/Melanchthon (from Luther):

Prayer is such a key element of living a day full of the goodness of the Lord. Just living a day can be a wearisome task. And unless you have the Good Lord and His Holy Spirit empowering you, there is nothing good you can make out of the time you have.

“Teach us to number our days” the Word says. That means to realise that you only have so many days, only a certain amount of time to do this or that, before the whistle is blown, or more like the “trump of God” and that’s it. The bottle is capped, the pen is set aside, the candle is blown out, the book is closed, the ringer sounds and that’s it. Game over. How many points did you score?

But you have to work with and for the Lord if you want your days to be good ones, truly lasting ones—as in fruit that will last.

So what is on your heart, or what is stopping you from giving yourself to the Lord both in service and in prayer? Open up to Him. Tell Him the secrets of your heart, tell Him what troubles your mind, and let Him soothe and comfort you and then empower you to do the jobs that He has in store just for you. Along with them comes the rewards too, for having lived a full life for Jesus.

But it all starts with prayer. With that thread, the whole thing will fall apart, or at least be a whole lot harder than it need be.

Here’s a simple prayer I can teach you to pray.

“Dear Lord,

I want to serve You again this day. Please fill me with Your Spirit, so I don't offend You or others, but bring Your Kingdom into my everyday life, and teach others to follow You too, as the Lord of their life, and their eternal King. Amen.

Pray and He'll make a way.

The impossible becomes possible when you ask for the God who can do anything to help you do His will.

(We prayed differently, but it is a matter of the heart and the fact that you show up daily to His throne.)

Woman with the 2 mites to share:

I'm a busy woman now, helping to support widows and mothers of children who don't have a way to bring in their needs. With Jesus and His team of helpers I bring them aid and tend to their needs. I also help with children who have come to heaven. I work hard with children on earth who lack earthly fathers and the aid he can bring. I whisper words of encouragement into the ears of mothers who are struggling to make ends meet. And I especially encourage the poor to give what they can to Jesus, to forsake what little they might have if others will get to know Jesus better. And then I work with the team to see to it that they are abundantly blessed. Or I might encourage the children with faith in their Heavenly Father, who will look after them no matter what; that He will hear and answer their prayers.

When they get faith because they prayed and God supplied, this is like a building block for a firm foundation for them to build their life on. Sometimes its best that there are real needs, special desperate occurrences, some things that makes a person feel that need and then if they use that needy situation to reach up to the Lord in faith and their prayer is answered, this makes them so much richer in the real way, than if they merely never had been in want or poor. It's so much better to gain the riches of faith in the God who can do anything and everything, than to just have what you want and need at every moment of each day.

So, think of that next time you are in need. Jesus knows and has even set things up so that you will ask in faith. Perhaps he had a gift to give you and a lesson to teach you that came with the gift. Then when you communicate with Him you are blessed with both and are stronger for it.

Help people reach up to the true riches, and get what they need most of all—not just food, money, or a place to live well, but faith in Jesus, and knowing just how very capable He is in supplying everyone's needs, if they'll just ask in faith and then do whatever He says to do to get that answer to prayer.

There is usually is at least a little step to take. It might be to give to others, even when you have many needs yourself. Or it might be to read the word and pray more. Or perhaps to praise your way to victory. Or to jump out of bed by faith that He is going to help you do what you need to that day—and support you, enabling you to.

Children have His heart's priority. So in helping children grow in love and in faith you are doing what is most dear to His heart. Be glad every time you can help a child get to know Jesus a bit more. He loves them so and wishes for them to know how near and dear they are to Him. Don't ever think they are just little things that don't need all that much attention and prayer, for they are very high up on His to-care-for priorities. In supplying their needs for help and inspiration, you are helping and encouraging Jesus. He really feels it. It actually goes into His heart.

So do it in love, as you do when you give someone a special and dear gift from your heart. In helping children it's like you are sitting there and handing Jesus a gift that cost you a lot, but you did it because You know it makes Him so happy. Then He takes you in His arms and loves you big, and pours His love back into your heart. If you have ever had Jesus thank you for something, in person, it's really too wonderful to describe.

Keep thanking Him for the gift of being able to serve Him and the chance to love and live with His little ones. If you do it right and cheerfully, He will then richly reward you and thank you for all that you gave to Him.

Let me pray for you.

“Darling Jesus, the lover of children and anything that is pure. I ask that Your balm of compassion be poured on her as she surrenders her life to give life and healing, faith and care to Your little ones. May she be as brave as the challenges she faces will need her to be. And let her listen to Your “well done” every day when she does so.”

You know you don't have to wait until the very end of your life to hear His “well done”. In fact you should ask for it each day. And if He doesn't say it, and doesn't commend you, then it should make you change your pace and do things that will produce His commendation. And only do those things that would make Him smile.

Joanna (who served Jesus and disciples):

[From the women who helped provide for Jesus' disciples]

If it wasn't for me and some of the other women who did our best to provide for Jesus and His travelling team while they tried to escape trouble and get their job done, the story would have been very different. Of course God could have called others to do what I and the other women did. It's not that it was me personally, but the fact that some humble folks were doing their part in a supporting role for the main actors, and the Jesus playing the most prominent and leading role. Later he passed it over to His disciples to carry on the work He had started. But during those years when He needed to be hidden out and couldn't just walk to the shop, or into anyone's house to get food and rest, then it was vital that those of us who could keep secrets would find Him and feed Him and the others.

So just because your name isn't the most famous in all the world and you aren't being swarmed with fans, yet, just keep doing your job of be a support to the work of God. He wants to use you in whatever way you will let him.

You know it does have to do with the extent of service that people will allow in their life. Jesus can have a whole long list of really important jobs for His Kingdom, but some people will say yes to this, but not to that. Some would agree to one part of the job but not the other. And so forth. Like those who said “We'll follow you Jesus, as long as I can do it when want to, and get done the other things I wish to.” That is having limits and not really being totally all out for Jesus. But when there is someone who will do anything and everything, without limits, no matter how hard or seemingly impossible, then Jesus is very glad because they allowed Him to use them greatly.

Sometimes it's not just that some people are called to do big jobs and others small. But some people just won't give up some aspect, or just can't manage to do this or that, and so then it shapes what the Lord can or won't ask of them. He is very thankful for anyone who helps Him, but those who come with two empty hands, an empty schedule to be filled by Jesus, and a heart that has no other reasons for doing things but just out of love to make Jesus happy, and isn't afraid of this and that, these ones make Jesus very grateful and He can use them for long and hard jobs.

See, we couldn't be women who sat around and gossiped or just were there for the fun of it. We knew it was serious business and Jesus wasn't the most liked by any of the authorities due to what He preached as well as the way the crowds would get wild and crazy over Him. –But that's just because there was only one of Him. Now, however, with many Spirit-filled followers, He can be there for many others all at the same time, as He works through believers all over the world.

It was a job we treasured and were thankful for any and all help we could give, even when it cost us lots in the end, and our hearts were broken when He was taken from Earth in His visible form. But at least for some time after He did keep showing Himself to people in special places at special times, and this really encouraged us all.

Then, more than ever, were we determined to tell others the good news and share the Gospel with others. We knew His leaving us in the form He usually had been in was out of love, not due to a lack of it. We knew that He had given the utmost sacrifice.

Now we women have made up for time lost with Him down there, and have plenty to talk about. And He trusts us with new jobs now. –Like encouraging others to seek Him, to find Him, and to share what they have with His followers and disciples while they still have the time and ability to, and that they will be repaid.

Maid of Namaan's servant:

I am the maid who helped to point the way. I wasn't the way. I couldn't make Naaman better or healed. But I could bring up an idea of what they could do. I could point in the direction of God, or of His prophet that could help then to point the way.

So if you don't think there is much you can do, and can't actually do more than you already are doing, sometimes just a word that points someone in the right direction is what is needed. They can start then their journey towards the light.

When you each do your little job, and do those little things that you can to help Jesus, the Lord will bless it and you. My name wasn't recorded, but my deed was. That is so that all humble and unknown-about servants, those not even named, can see that this is relatable. They too, no matter how busy they are, can do at least something to be a witness that can change the lives of those that they are around.

They don't have to be known for the big jobs, because it's often the little keys that open big doors. So you doing all you can, even if it's only a small fraction of all that you wish you could do, can be a vital part of whatever God's plan might be. And it might be the very fact that it's small and seems hardly worth doing, that might make you miss out on a blessing by not taking the step to put that good thought from the Lord into practice.

Wisely guard the little keys, the little things that might bring a big good win for Jesus.

Never despise the little things. It might be just the factor that is missing and needs doing to make a big plan come into play that would affect a whole lot more people.

Roman at the time of Early Believers, like Perpetua and her team:

I was the Roman guard who took pity on this band of new believers in the one who was called the Christ. It wasn't a new concept that He would come. The Jews and others had been talking about his arrival for centuries. But the new twist was that now it was in past tense, that He had already made His entrance into the world, and needed and wanted a following. He wanted to take over the world.

If it was a man, a normal man trying to take authority, that we could have dealt with, for we Romans knew how to take charge. But no, He was everywhere, and unseen for the most part. He couldn't be conquered. The best way we had was to try to control the people who had surrendered to Christ's rule. But that was impossible, most of the time, as Christ in them made them brave, strong, and fearless in the face of any assaults to their faith.

This just angered us all the more.

But the story doesn't stop there.

When this band of young and new in faith believers were being persecuted where I worked, I took pity because I saw them not as a threat but as an asset to our empire. If only we had a bit more of what they did. Perhaps the concept of love and joy wasn't an altogether bad thing to have. And they seemed the few around who really possessed these attributes.

So this thought began to work its way into my mind and I started to think we should be getting from them rather than taking from them. To take away is rude and uncultured, or so I began to see. But to ask for them to impart rather than we may improve our lives, was a wiser option.

So I took the step. I chose to stop wishing to drown out this sect and set of beliefs but rather to learn all I could.

I set out to find out more. I'd listen when I would ever hear a believer speak. I'd observe with curiosity rather than with envy and criticism.

And it didn't take long but that I was more and more convinced they got it right, and it was we, the Roman empire that needed to change. I believed in my heart, and before I died I confessed my sins and confessed with my mouth that Jesus was the God He said He was. I believed He was the one who the men and women were giving up their lives and freedom for.

I took Him too. And He can rule in your heart and life too. But it's best not to wait until the end just to get things right with Him. Because the sooner you let Jesus be your King, the better. The more territory that Jesus can claim, through working in people's hearts and life, the better things will be for you. He'll just make things better. Most of all, by working your heart and the hearts of others.

Be brave, and endure unto the end with faith.

Iraqi martyr:

I weep for my people. I was born and raised a good Muslim, or so I thought it was. But then your Lord Jesus came to me and lifted me up and away from the darkness I was ensnared and entrapped in by so many rules and regulations. Now I am free.

I was hoping to live my faith for a lot longer, but that wasn't to be. I gave my life for Jesus, in similar fashion as He gave His life for me.

Now I can cry both tears of joy and tears of remorse. I am ashamed for the time loss. The time I took a long time to choose His ways and His love. It took me far too long. And look what I missed? But the time I did choose to believe Him was a happy time, happy in my heart.

I can't teach and preach like I long to, but I can pray. I can pour out my heart and tears in prayer for the lost, the many lost in that region. Truth will always be harder to be believed than lies, especially there. For truth often comes with the cost of a life. Are you willing to die for the truth in order to save and share the Good News with others? If so, then you are going to be greatly pleased, for you will please the King well, the King of Kings.

There are many fighting in both the physical and the spiritual realms for power, for control. That is like the seat of power. Whoever takes the lands in that region—whether near or far—effects the way things go everywhere else. There is a power struggle, and it shows up as civil unrest in the world, especially in the region where I lived. But greater is the One, Jesus, who lives and reigns in you.

The salvation of people, that they give over their heart and mind to their Redeemer, is the real battle that you can be engaging in, and you must be if you want to be crowned as a hero and winner. Those who are just on the sidelines, watching what is going on in the world, but not really making moves for the Kingdom of Christ, will likewise be sitting on the sidelines when rewards are passed out. Be a mere spectator here and now, instead of working for the salvation of the Kingdom of God and its reign in people's hearts; and do so there and then when crowns of life and rewards of honour are passed out.

Or endure the jeering here and now and get to hear all of Heaven Cheering for you later on. Won't that be a great joy!

I pray now for the lost to be redeemed and the King to be enthroned in the hearts and minds of mankind.

It's better to cry now, while you can, make your voice heard as you cry out to be heard amid the clamour of the wiles of the Devil and all the mass confusion; and cry to the God of Heaven for the salvation of souls—then to weep and lament later on when it's too late for you personally to do something.

Cry now, cry out in desperation, cry through persecution, and you'll be laughing and cheering later on.

Merely laugh now and try to make yourself more comfortable, and die in your confusion and forgetfulness of what is really going on, and cry later because your life was miss spent.

Darlings, hold on to the faith, and I'll teach you to value the time you have, while you have the chance to please the King. Life is too short to mind many things that people care for.

Only one life, will soon be past, only what is done for the good of Jesus' love will last.

Abraham:

What did I accomplish? It was my faith that I was known for. Not the volumes of books I never wrote, nor the remote and new areas of land I never set out to discover. Nor the king of many nations that I wasn't. I did some notable deeds in the power of the Lord God. But what was the main thing I was remembered for, and the reason of my existence was to show faith, to have faith in the invisible God, and to show utter obedience to Him.

He showed himself to me at different times and in different ways, but for the most part He Himself remained unseen. And this was all part of the walk of faith. Would I trust Him and obey Him though He ruled from a realm largely unseen?

The tests came in many ways, and in some never thought of ways. But I had to be as ready to move and travel as I was to do what God said to do. I was to stay on the move here and there throughout my lifetime, with nothing more than a tent for the most part. But God blesses faith, and He blessed me with special things that showed others that God really was with me and looked out for me.

So don't worry. Have faith in His care and in His protection. Then you'll please Him. And you do wish to please Him, for He is the one that can make anything, and teach you anything, and rewards you in one way or the other. The goal in life should always be to do as He pleases, then you'll have joy. Any other way, like putting yourself or your property and possessions as most important will only take joy right out of your life.

It's like building a house. You have to first lay the foundation and get it straight, then other things can be added. So if your faith and trust and obedience to Jesus is the strongest part of your life, then other things can be added. Then "all these things can be added unto you". But if you lack the rock foundation, if you aren't built on the rock of hearing and most of all obeying God's Word, what Jesus tells you to do or not do, then anything placed on a muddy land and sandy surface isn't added, but just piled up and will decay. It will take things away from you. It'll take away your time, because you'll have to be constantly fixing the things that keep falling and breaking down, due to their lack of a good foundation. It will take away from your joy because no success is enjoyed; you're always having to fix up the weak things you keep trying to make and place in your life. It will take away your funds and resources, because God won't be blessing it. You'll have to pay all the bills yourself as well as many other extra expenses, because God won't support what you haven't let Him be the support under. If you want His support you need to be supported by His Word; built up on it.

"Built up in the faith, as ye have been taught."

Colossians 2:7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

Isaac:

Come to my Heavenly tent. I have a nice welcoming tent where I treat visitors to this Heavenly realm. You don't have to be passed on to come here either. Just close your eyes and pray and the Lord can let you see what is happening here, and hear a word of counsel, advice, and instruction.

It's a special place for weary travellers to come. I'll give them fresh milk and cheese, some berries and bread, and treats that are Heaven made. There are soft wool stuff pillows, or something of the sort. There are woven rugs that have many colours to lie on while you warm your feet by a special fire. Some music is played with Heavenly harps and other stringed and wind type of instruments. These sounds relax you and lift your heart to Jesus.

Are you tired? Is the road long? Have you been going and going in faith for a long while? Are there people that just won't accept your company?—Like I and my team had to endure at times. Praise Him for all that He has done, for you and for others, and sing songs of praise. Then curl up and be nourished with treats from His Word, spoken right to your own heart. The nourishment of Heaven will sustain you for the road you must travel on.

Keep your heart filled with Heaven and food from Jesus' table, then your feet can walk on and on and do your Master's will.

Come rest your head in my tent and dream of Jesus, and one day you will be with Him, in person, forever.

I love you.

Leah (of Jacob):

I loved children and gave them my best. I ensured they were kept warm and well watched over, as best as I could. I didn't live as long as my children, but I gave them my best while I was around, then others had to take over to help out. I loved seeing them run and play and learn new things. That was my life's calling. My special anointing, to raise a family.

Things weren't fairy-tale perfect for me, as you know. I didn't have the most romantic marriage and was pretty lonely often times, but to make up for it God gave me many children, and these filled my need for fun and friends.

However, when they got older they started to show signs of sin in their life. Pride, and anger, stubbornness, and wanting things their own way. They did things that made both me and Jacob unhappy and deeply sorrowful. But just like us, they too had to learn life's lessons, and many times the hard way.

But it all worked out good in the end. Their lives were spared through all the tough times of life. The Good Lord made them each live very long lives, both so that His will could be done and big tribes could start, and also to give them each time to learn some of the many lessons that they each needed to.

So don't be too dismayed, mother, father, caretaker, when things of the wrong side start to show in the lives of the young people that you have given your all to help raise. Their life, too, will be full of lessons, some hard, some easy, depending on the choices they make. But the Lord is their Lord, and one day He'll get them all straightened out. And it'll be to His glory, not yours, that anything worked out good and well. And you all can rejoice in the victories won by God's Son Jesus Christ. It'll all be to His glory in the end. All glory to Jesus.

Joseph (Of Mary, carpenter):

A carpenter by trade I worked, with scarcely a break. I didn't know exactly all that was to happen, but I put my heart into providing for my family. And that meant training my sons in my career, in the family trade, so they could one day provide for theirs. They had other skills and talents as well, so they had some choice in what they could do.

When I saw my oldest son's hands working with wood, I knew there was a special touch, some connection He had with it; almost like He'd made the wood—not just the items He was making out of it. And I knew His destiny would have something to do with wood—though it happened differently than I thought. For his life was held up for all around to see as He was displayed on a cross made of a roughly hewn wooden cross. On a tree He was placed, so that all who believed in Him would get to taste of the tree of life.

When Jesus walked away from the carpentry to build the Kingdom of His true Father, His younger brothers continued each in their callings, and Mary was provided for. But the look in His eyes came as a special surprise when I sat waiting one day for Jesus to bring me something I needed. He was not the same boy I had raised. There was a look that was other-worldly, and I knew from that moment on, that He would fulfil His God given destiny and calling. Though my son, He was not entirely my son. He had an eternal mission to complete. Though with our family as one of us, He was destined to be so much more.

I thanked God we had the joy of having Him in our midst. I just hoped I had trained Him in whatever ways I was meant to, so He could walk into the next shoes, the next role that God had for Him.

Hananiah (Shadrach):

It wasn't about the clothing and style of dress that made us stand out from the crowd, but the words we said. These are what clothed us in a new way and earned us respect.

So is it with you. People will give you places of honour based on the words that you say, as these reveal the inner soul that is covered by mere pieces of cloth. The naked soul of a man is revealed as soon as he opens his mouth to talk and give his opinion or thoughts on a matter. Talking is like stripping away a cloak and revealing what is really there.

It can be very humbling to speak, especially to certain crowds or groups of people. Some people are just too proud to reveal their thoughts when they should be speaking up for the truth. Others are too bold and just saying all kinds of things to just anyone, that perhaps should be kept in. Again, it's like removing clothing. It should be done at the right time, in the right situation.

Talking and speaking is much the same, you need to open your mouth to the right people and say what will benefit them. Open the doors of your lips wisely, because, what you get to do or don't get to do will depend a lot on what you say or don't say.

The way you say things, and how you phrase it can be like putting on a garment and being dressed in a certain way. Garments and clothing can get you into places where wearing that is accepted, or by your outward appearance you can be shut out of entering or being in some places.

Even Jesus Christ told some parables indicating that clothing—the spiritual garment you wear—will give or deny access to Heaven. If you speak the words of requesting salvation and asking for forgiveness, then the 'garment of salvation' is on you and you are given access, and the old garment of sin is removed.

If your lips show forth praise to Jesus, then the 'garment of praise' is on you. It's a beautiful garment that is allowed to enter into the courts of God and come before His throne and approach to Him. And when you pray in humility, the old rags of self righteousness are removed and you are clean before Him.

So many times throughout the Bible the symbolism of clothing is used. We are to put on the armor of light; Jesus put on the cloak of zeal. What people see is often what they hear us saying or what we write.

Put on the Lord Jesus today, that is to give His Word first place in your time and in the words you say. Let the words of your mouth be acceptable to Him. (Psalm 19:14)

Michael (Meshach):

The girls did look rather pretty and it was hard to not get distracted from our mission in the courts of the king of the nation we were serving in. But if we were to complete our calling, to be some of God's servants in high up positions of honour, we had to stay pure and true, and that included not getting lured by the love of women. We weren't to marry any of them. And that was really hard for us at times. They were raised and trained in the ways of their nation and its false gods, and we in the ways of the Lord our true God.

But we were called out and set apart to do a certain job there. Though it was tough, we're glad now for having stayed true. So if things are hard for you also and you wish you could have just any companion and mate, just someone to fill the emptiness that a person feels when they are far from home—like you are far from your Heavenly home—know that you are not alone.

Jesus is there with you. He too had to give up having a companion, as in a wife to mother His children, as He too had a job to be completed. He had to put aside the things of the flesh while raising spiritual children. Paul the apostle did the same, as he wanted to nurture the children of God, and raise up fruit, that is children (new believers), for Jesus. He gave up getting married and settling down with a family, in order to raise up the family of God, to bring people to Jesus. Paul wanted as many sons of God, and daughters of God to be added to the Heavenly family.

Endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Give your life to Him. Let Him be your companion. He knows the tests you are enduring and He'll make your way easy and light as you lean on Him. Trust Him for the long wait it is at times before finding a life companion of your own.

Keep your heart for Jesus. Stay called out. Be more willing to stay single and focused on your mission for God, than you are in finding the perfect jewel of a mate and getting things all perfect in that department. Trust Him with your future, and focus on your present responsibilities. And if the Lord knows your life should include a partner to share the journey with, He'll bring you together. But if not, as will be the case for many, just be a team with your Creator, and do the hard work for Him now in order to bring new children of God into Heaven.

Be brave. It won't be too long before, while in the courts of Heaven, in order to thank you for your patient obedience you'll get all the joys you ever wanted. But you gotta endure some times of waiting now.

God bless and keep you patient and holding on, and bearing as much fruit for the Kingdom of God as possible.

Azariah (Abednego):

I help people keep to their faith through times of fiery trials. There is no test that passes the view of the Redeemer. He knows all that people are tested in. It is all monitored. And great peace have they which love the Lord's law. Because of a love of the truth they are saved, they pass the tests of compromise and addiction, of falling out to do things in the ways of the world. It's God's Word that keeps you. It shields you and surrounds you and braces you up, and shoots back some fiery blasts back to your opponent. The Word is the fire and life of God. It's going to keep your fire of conviction burning.

Just because you live in a nice house and around nice people doesn't stop the serpent from attempting to beguile you just like those in the Garden of Eden. You are going to be tested each and every day to see just how far for Jesus you are willing to go. Will you do something in some way that is for your personal benefit but doesn't really

help the Kingdom of God nor the King being enthroned in your life; something that rather eats away at the good progress that you have made towards giving Jesus every part of your mind and life?

These tests come in the form of decisions that you must make daily—will you humbly submit to what your Lord wants, or merely what makes you happier for the moment? Is there something you really like, or think that you will, but it puts a stop to everything that you are meant to be working towards and will make many of Christ's goals for your life nearly impossible to reach?

It's all about, Will you put Jesus first and let yourself go?

I know what it means to be tested, constantly, for there were many opportunities for failure in the conviction department. So many times I could have just said, "That's enough, it costs too much to stay true to the Lord our God." But day by day, through faith in His Word and through reminding myself of it, I was able to keep surrendering to God's will for my life and being the example God wished for me to be. And I'm so very glad now for having stayed true. Oh, the honour, and the Heavenly wealth too that comes to those who put Jesus first and show their utter loyalty to Him, even when it costs them their very life, and certainly the praise of men, and some earthly wealth.

Read the Word of God with the mindset of doing it. How can I live this today? He'll show you by His Holy Spirit. Some things are meant to be lived every day of your life—like praise and dependence on Jesus. Other things are for a certain team or people type—like wearing a certain thing or eating and not eating this and that. But whatever it is that His Word through the Spirit of God tells you that you must do or not do, make it a priority daily to live out His highest will for you. Then you'll be blessed and come to know Jesus better. It's the path of obedience that leads you right to Him.

At first the path of obeying might not seem attractive, that is that doing something He asked you to do might not be what you want. But as you take the steps of obedience and conviction, and in faith just do what He said, then you find He is there to walk with you. He was there with you all along, you just needed to take a little step to obey something and then He revealed Himself more to you and showed himself strong on your behalf.

So trust Him as you take those little steps—perhaps ones others aren't being asked to take right now, because you are the one He wants to do it. And it's the most beneficial thing for you to do as well. It's going to be good for you as well in some way.

The Joy of Life

--As told by Hanna, mother of Samuel

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"A woman's crown is the joy of seeing her children blossom and grow before her eyes. This is full womanhood. You will know it one day, and will be glad." My mother told me, as I sat on the hill watching my brothers and small sister running in the afternoon's soft sunlight.

I knew what it was like to care for others, for I was oft counted on to fill in for mother and care for not only my own family, but those who would come to us in need of aid. A loving heart my mother had, and deep within, when all childish dreams were brushed away, I wanted to be just like her.

I dreamed of the day when I too would raise my own, with a loving husband at my side. It seemed so perfect—I was sure my life would happen just as I thought.

I kept busy, not only with my given chores, but I wanted to learn all I could about being a mother. I often was with the women doing the washing, and heard the latest town happenings, who was doing what, and how many children so-and-so's cousin had, and the like. I always paid close attention to the happenings in the social life of these women, for being a growing young lady I had much to learn.

I wondered oft of love, what it was, when it came to the bond between a man and his wife. I wondered what started it, or ended it, as I saw in some of the town's women—though married, their hearts were cold.

My aunt, sister of my mother, never bore children. She was in her 40's, when I was a teen. Her husband died when she was married but a decade. I saw the strain on her face as she carried about her chores. She seldom was in the company of others, for she found it a disgrace to have lived her life without what most women found fulfilment in.

My heart ached for her at times, but her world seemed so very different than mine. I had a future to look forward to, with dreams ready to be enjoyed. There was much I had not tasted yet, though I was sure all that would touch my life would bring me greater joy than I'd known as a child.

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I often woke with the sun shining on my face, as my cot was closest to the window. Being the eldest I was expected to be the first up, and to help prepare the younger ones for their day, dressing them, helping prepare food for the family, and all the many things that went into a day. When night fell I was always tired, for my days were full, and much was expected of me.

Some days I helped to take the clothing my mother had made to sell at the market, along with many others selling their goods and wares. We lived frugally, and often didn't have the many things I wish we had. There were the new style dresses that the richer girls got to wear. But I was taught to be content, that what we had was all we truly needed, and not to look on others with envy. I was taught that God was the one thing that was to be heeded to, with all one's heart—the rest, passing things that one could go without.

My one dream, and the embers of it caught flame as the years passed on, was to live in a beautiful house, near the sea, with many friends, and a family of my own—and a brood of children to be proud of. Children that were respectful—as we had been taught; that were wise in the skills needed in life; who were not lazy, but taught to work hard. I imagined so much. Oft on my walks before sundown I'd imagine the names I wanted to call my young ones. I thought of what kind of a man my husband would turn out to be. I wanted him to fear God, and to respect me and to give to our family the best he could.

It's important to note that one, of my age and gender, didn't have much say in whom I married, or what my life would be like. We were taught to respect and obey our husbands, and to do as they would have us do. The freedom I felt in my mind, of choosing how I wanted things to be, helped to relieve me from the bondage of the way I knew things would be in reality.

If I were to have know all that was to happen in my life, I think I would have made different decisions when starting out in my young adult life, as a maturing woman. But I thank God that the future was veiled, for then He was able to bring about His most peculiar plan and design. He truly does all things well.

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I first met the man I was to marry when I was just a young teen. He came for a large family gathering. There were so many there, I hardly would have remembered him, had the memory been allowed to fade. However, shortly afterwards, he asked for my hand in marriage, and in time I was given to him.

He was strong and wise, and had a peculiar knowledge of the ways and thoughts of women. An insight that could only have been God given. He'd say the most startling things at times, for I felt he knew what I was thinking.

In a way we married for love, but we were also an acceptable match—our class, relation and religion (being of the same religious strain). When I first saw him, I thought little more of him than I did the many others there. But I came to know him better, and in time found him acceptable, in my opinion.—Not that that would have changed things all that much, but I knew that somewhere in his heart, it meant a great deal to him to be loved, to be treated like he was found pleasing to someone.

After knowing him for some time, there was another side to him I had not been introduced to yet, the matter of Penninah, the one who in time would likewise be his wife, and with whom I would share this man.

He had been promised to marry another. He had known this for many years. It was just what was to happen. Though he felt no real attraction, he knew that love wasn't always what it was made up to be. He felt that hard work, loyalty, and doing one's best for a family is what gave it quality. He was determined to keep these qualities foremost, and would do his best to provide a good home and environment for his wife and children that he looked forward to having.

Knowing that he had a promise to keep didn't make it all that much easier. I would share him with another, who he might find more appealing, more beautiful, and be a better wife. What did I know? I was younger in years. There was no choice but to go on with the plan.

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With my dreams shattered, of being a wonderful and only wife, having the say in the matters of home that were mine to speak of, knowing that would be treated as the youngest, I was left with one hope. Children. I would bear him many, beautiful and handsome children. Mine would be his joy, and through this I would gain his favour—or so I thought.

We talked deeply, Elkanah and I. Me sharing my hopes, and he sensing my feelings, and trying to allay my worries—those worries that he seemed to read and see as if I had said them clearly myself.

Oh, I so wanted to believe him, I so wanted to trust. But my heart and soul churned, for some how I sensed things would be more challenging than I'd expected.

The days past slowly, as I pondered what my now-changed future prospects would bring. I had some good talks with my mother. She confided in me, heard me out, prayed for me, and I know it was her help and prayers that put my feet more stably down on the path I was to take. She reminded me how God was always with us, always there when we needed Him, and this change in my life would only enhance my relationship with Him, if I were to keep my heart turned to Him. His love would be more than enough for the rest of my life.

The day came when I was wed to this man, thus embracing my future. There was much to learn in those few months. We spent much time together. Though we worked most of the time, building a home and life, we took time off to enjoy building a friendship as well.

Elkanah wanted our bond to grow firm, before we embraced the more complete marriage that we knew was in store for us. It was in these days and months, when he and I were for the most part alone together, that I learned what it was to be wed, to keep house, to serve and yield to a man who had authority over me. I learned to love his heart, as well as to respect the things he cherished. I was to never speak hurtful words about his decision to marry Penninah, nor allow myself to lift myself above her. We were to be as equals. He considered us so, and desired that we do the same.

The day came when we were as a family. She was already with child the day we lived close with one another, and I could see their joy, for their first young one. I could see the light in his eyes when he thought of the little one, his very first offspring. I knew he was glad to be a father. There is something special about a first born, and Penninah had gained that reward. But I knew in time the joy would be ours as well. I would bear him the most beautiful son he'd ever seen, and nothing else would matter. I had many dreams of what our son would be like. He would add sparkle to our days, warmth to our home, and would be the one I knew I would love more than any.

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Each month that passed by that I saw I was, yet once again, not with child, was a crushing blow. Sometimes I would hide the pain, and act as if it was not all that hard for me, and I would busy myself in the many things there was to do. Other times, I would ache and weep many hours, for I knew this was one thing I could not make happen, no matter how much I desired it. It was only a gift, and I had to be patient. The waiting was hard.

Once when I had been out on my own, praying and seeking my God for relief, hoping to find something joyful to live for, to do, something that could take the place of this very empty void in my

heart, I came back to be greeted by Penninah's eyes meeting mine. The look could only mean one thing. Another child. Another gift from God to her. Another joy she could share with our husband. Another loss for me.

I could not even look at her. We were going to have a family gathering, as her family was going to visit. We would have lamb cooked in spiced broth, baked goods, and treats only rarely enjoyed. I could not even bear to be in the same room with her, to prepare the meal. I left to a quiet place. I knew my heart's cries were heard, for when I spoke softly I could feel these words come to me, "Your time is not yet. Though you hurt, and are torn with grief, this will only make your joy more full. Trust in Me, your Lord and God. For I see and I know."

I felt His peace come into my soul. I knew, though the way was hard, He would walk me through it.

I stayed away for the whole of the family celebration, for I thought if I were to attend, my heart would be torn once again. I stayed still and quiet, remembering these words to me. Later in the evening I ate some of what was left of the feast, before retiring for the night.

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God truly grants to those who reach for Him, the grace that they need in the times of deepest pain. Sometimes an inexplicable peace would be mine—Their son's first birthday was one time such as this.

As I looked at him playing with some stones he'd found, I saw his curls, looked into his little eyes. He was beautiful indeed. *My pain shouldn't rob the joy of loving a child.* After all he was the son of my husband. I decided I would make room in my heart for him, and any others Penninah would bear, I would love them and let them be a part of my heart, in some way.

I left him then, for he was being looked after by a friend. I wanted to make something special for the evening meal, for it was a joyous event, and I wanted to be a part of it. There were things that Elkana and Penninah only shared, and things that he and I shared alone. But why should my grief cause me to miss joys that could be shared together?

The evening was a beautiful one. I was given such a sweet peace. God never lets things be too hard, and He granted a measure of joy for this evening.

* * *

Oh, that the joy could have remained, and lasted on till my time was at hand. But as surely as the sunsets, no matter how bright a day it was, so do trials come, though one has known joy.

I had finished the washing when Elkanah came to talk with me. He said he'd need to go away for a month, there were business deals and other things that needed to be tended to. What was hard was not merely his absence, and the fact that we'd be without his help for that time, but knowing that when he was gone things were much harder on the personal front. With him, at least I knew there was

someone who belonged to me, even in part, and to whom I belonged. There was also the way that Penninah acted that seemed to amplify things for the worse, and without him there to help set things straight, things could get more emotional and difficult between us.

I cried a bit when he bid me farewell, not knowing how I'd fare in the next few weeks. He wiped my tears with his thumb and said, "I love you, more than any sons you could, and will yet bear me." With a kiss on the lips he was on his way. And oh the tears flowed so much more now. His love was dear to me, but the pain and feeling of loss, of not being able to be all I dreamed I could be, hurt me so very deeply. I had to learn to trust.

There were times when trust came easy. Times when I knew I was fulfilling what He had for me. It's easy to trust when you feel good about life, or that you are in the place you are supposed to be, and things are following the chosen path. But for the most part the clouds lingered in the way before me. I could not see the reason for the way things had turned out.

I had to make a choice however, how I was to react and fare over this next while. A sense of peace could be mine if I were to put my mind to it, and let our God give it to me. I went and sat down under the shade of a tree, taking in the beauty of the nature around. A small bird came up close and sang its cheery song. It was as if our Lord had sent him with the message that I was not forgotten, and my life, as small or low as it may seem, was in everyway beautiful to Him.

I prayed with a determination to hide all grief under the blanket of His peace. I prayed to be kept so busy helping others that my own life would not be a concern. I prayed to be given joy amid the rain clouds that seemed to so often pour out onto my heart.

I got up, and decided that I was going to do with my life whatever I could, and I would not think of myself as having received less in life. I knew I was loved by many, no matter how things had turned out for me. This I needed to dwell on.

The night came and as I lay in bed I saw visions of children playing, laughing and smiling. There was a choice to make with each thought that came to me—I had to choose the way my feelings went when thinking on these things. When I chose to be glad for others, or for the children that I had come to know, and for the times I was allowed to be a part of their life, then my heart rested contentedly. If I allowed the darker thoughts to prevail as I thought on these things, then I was torn, and my grief could not even be expressed to the degree it was felt, and the path back to the place of sunshine was harder to find.

I had to learn to direct my thoughts and my heart's concerns to things that brought peace and joy to others; I could not allow my own feelings to take me to the depths. I learned that to have a beautiful life it doesn't take having all one's heart's desires lived out, and have many wonderful things to show for it. It simply takes being what one was made to be, and discovering what that is, moment by moment. It's often so very different than what one has dreamed of.

If we were to all live the dreams we had as young children, this world would lack the depth that can be found in the hearts of men. It would lack knowing the joys of receiving after being in want. It would be filled with more selfishness than already exists. When men's hearts are broken, their dreams laid to waste, their ambitions crumble before their eyes, they are in essence in need. Incomplete souls who need Someone make this world more open to love, to our Lord, to His ability to fill the many holes our lives contain. This brings a much richer quality to the nature of this world's people.

There is so much that can be gained when in want, when humbled, when not seeing all one's dreams played out before one's eyes. There is a richness that comes into one's soul as they see things happen differently than hoped for, and they learn to take what comes in stride, and bend with the wind that blows on them. Many new qualities are gained than ever would have, were things to go according to their plan.

These things are hard to see, difficult to understand, and take great faith to yield to them, knowing things will turn out for good in the end. I wasn't that submissive a student when learning in this grade. I balked, fought against it—though nothing changed the way things were. It wasn't till I learned that all was in His hands, and He indeed does all things well, that I was allowed to pass on to the next step in my learning—and to the joys that were awaiting me.

* * *

"Sarah!" I heard her mother calling, she was 7, and liked to run free, though it was now time to help with the supper. There was much that needed to be tended to for this large family. Ruben was 5, and was often getting into things that were troublesome to us all, being the most rascally of the family. Oden was nearly 2, and then there was the eldest, 8 ½ Connor. He often helped the men with the fieldwork, and was thought of as older than his age. He had to grow up fast.

When I saw him for the first time, those shining eyes and dark hair, I thought he was the dearest child I'd ever seen. I would have given anything at that time to have been the one to hold him proudly, showing I had born a son, to be the mother of this treasure.

So much had happened since then. Times of want and times of joy. Times of plenty, and times of giving. When the sun was nearly set, I went to pray in a quiet spot. I'd learned the strength of these times in prayer. Each time I chose to give my thoughts to our Lord, I always noticed changes—in my heart, in the way I reacted, in the way others acted in response to me.

Prayer had worked its way into my life as something I knew I could draw strength from. There wasn't always great change, but I always was given something from His hand, and I learned to accept His help, however He gave it, knowing that it would be enough.

I learned to be content, though I felt hurt or in want. When I looked at all that my life had, the many things others longed for that were mine, I felt very rich. I learned I had to think only on what was given, not what had been withheld. I learned, through my quiet times of prayer, that what was not present in my life was not a show of a lack of God's love, or Him playing favourites, for I felt His love so strong in my times of deepest pain. I knew it was but my lot in life, and I was to learn through it, and reach out to others who knew greater suffering.

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When the time for the yearly passover came, there was much to do. We were busy for over a week making preparations, as well as trying to keep up with the many other daily duties and situations. This time, like other times, I was emotional. It was a special time of connecting with the Lord, of showing Him our reverence, our thanks, our submission, our desire to follow Him more closely. It was somewhat like what many people feel when the year ends. They look over the past year, what they went through, and what they wish for the year ahead to bring. In some ways I responded much the same way. I looked over my life, my deeds, my heart's wishes, and prayed fervent prayers.

Two weeks before the trip was to be made, I was told that Penninah was with child again. I saw that look in her eye, I heard her unfeeling comments to me. Not only was it hard for her emotions to be calm, being that one gets rather short tempered, emotional, irritable and so forth when with child, but she generally carried a "I know he must love me more than you" attitude about her.

The truth was she was brought up feeling the lowest in her family, never was thought of much before. For the first time she felt of great worth. She was loved and cared for by a man, and was able to be what any woman would have wished to be—a fruitful mother, bearing their young.

Coping with her inferior feelings had been a painful one, most of her youth, so now, in her womanhood she well tried to over-compensate. Her way of expressing herself, and carrying herself was difficult at best to cope with, and left me miserable most of the time. I had to keep my heart on the Lord—which I didn't always do so good at, being but a fallible woman.

I learned that only by lifting up the Lord, by choosing to see others and ourselves through His eyes, can we feel complete. Distaining others, making them feel lower so that we might feel satisfied with our stature is a poor and hurtful way to live. It brings no real satisfaction to the one seeking respect, but merely serves to separate them from others, leaving them with the empty substance of one's self.

As we walked the road, traveling with friends and relatives, there was much catching up to do, stories to tell, gossip to hear. I tried to keep my spirit up engaging in conversations, or just enjoying the beauty of the land. It was tiresome, I was tired, hungry, and the children whined along the way. But we knew we'd so enjoy being at the temple once there.

When we arrived, there was lots of commotion, so many people were there for the purpose of worshiping our God. At least we had lots in common, and it was easy to interact with strangers. It gave us a brotherhood amongst ourselves. Penninah and I watching the children, while Elkannah worked out the duties of our sacrifice.

When it was time to feast, and to partake of the meat of our sacrifice, my heart could not take it any longer. The time I'd spent with the children and their mother was so very difficult. There was no love spoken to me, only harsh words, making me feel so low I could have cried a million tears right then. But I choose to hold it in—for the children's sake. I wanted to be strong, to hold on to the love I knew our Lord had for me—and for Penninah as well.

By the time we sat down, and the meal was portioned out, I could hold it in no longer. I slowly drew myself away, my heart churning inside, my tears building up. I walked away and the tears began to flow. My husband was there by my side. Knowing my heart, the hurt I felt, and knew there were hardly words to express what I was feeling. He put into words what he knew I was aching for inside.

Reassuring me of his love, letting me know that he loved me for who I was, with or without children, was a comfort. But my heart had to connect once again with its maker. I motioned I was going to go to the temple, with a gentle squeeze of the hand and a tender look, almost feeling my pain, he nodding his consent.

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As I wept I felt the very heart of my soul being poured out. No audible words could describe the depths I felt at that moment. But it's in the most desperate moments, when the soul reaches out for divine intervention that brings change in the most beautiful ways. In my heart of hearts I did only want God's will to be performed—though in times past this was clouded with my deep cravings for what I felt I missed so terribly in life.

When our desires are within His will, and our will is to fulfil His desires, then is true satisfaction known. I expressed to the Maker of our lives that the child He saw fit to give to me would not be hoarded, but in gratitude would be offered for use in His service, devoted completely to Him. How could I withhold that which He saw fit to freely give to me? I committed to Him all that I had and all that I would yet have—should He see fit to give children to me.

I could feel the words my heart was ringing out enter the courts of Heaven. So deep in prayer was I that I wasn't too aware of anyone else around me. I was before the Lord of Hosts, and I knew my heart was in His hands.

The silence was broken by Eli the priest's voice. He'd been watching from a short ways off, not knowing quite what to make of this blubbing woman, whose words he could not make out. Thinking I perhaps had too much to drink, he spoke to me. He would not have someone using this place of worship to display their drunkenness. Though upon hearing my heart's cry and seeing that I was indeed a woman filled with deep grief, he encouraged me that the Lord was with me and would care for my heart's deepest yearnings.

I had been told many times before that in His timing, God would see fit to give me a child. But something told me, as Eli spoke those words that that time was closer than ever. My heart felt a certainty that the days of being childless were nigh ended. Deep within I could sense that it was my solemn pledge and devotion to the Lord of all, the full commitment of my soul, that had changed things. When all I wanted was to live a life of beauty, to live a life where I felt all would look upon me with honor, and consider me blessed, that was not the time for this desire to be fulfilled. Our Lord had to first break down my selfish interests, cast down my pride to the ground, give me the desire to give everything to Him, to then work the best things out for me.

With a smile in my heart I returned to my family, who had now finished the united meal. When it was time to journey home, I didn't say much. I was communicating with the Lord in Heaven. Silence was for the most part on my lips, and a special peace was in my heart that I'd never felt before. The kind of peace that only comes when it knows for certain that their life is going according to their Maker's perfect plan. I had fully committed all to Him, and I knew all that would now happen would only lead to better and more wonderful days.

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“I’m with child” I said to myself over and over again as I gazed out my window over looking our field of corn. “God has looked upon me and blessed me with a child!”

Though I suffered a difficult pregnancy, and my body very weakened, still my heart was filled with joy. He had granted me my heart’s desire, as I promised to grant Him His.

Those first few months of pregnancy were very taxing. Often all I could do was rest and pray. There was plenty of time for contemplation and quiet communion.

A second miracle took place—in Penninah. One day I was lying, feverish and very uncomfortable. It had been over 3 days that I hadn’t been able to hold much down. Penninah came in to see how I fared. She brought a drink of herbs and a cloth to wipe my brow. I tried to speak, but she put her finger on my lips to quiet me.

“I owe you this service, for you have done much for our family. You’ve given though you have not received the fulfilment of being a mother yourself. I have always been jealous of you, in many ways. But I felt that being able to bear children for our husband was something I had that you had not. I put you down in an effort make myself feel better. But all I was left with was bitterness and a lack of true joy. To feel true joy in desires fulfilled, it must be mixed with genuine love and giving again of what one has gained. All that is hoarded and selfishly clung to will in the end only seem as ashes, nothing of true value. While it still shines, while the receiver yet feels the pleasure of holding a desired treasure, it is then that they must choose to share it with another. Only then will the shine of it remain.”

Penninah was referring to what she had learned in her life, and in her attitudes towards me and her family, but I knew that through her God was also speaking to me, confirming His will for me to give that which I most treasured. She continued to nurse me back to strength, and had her children tend to me in the times she couldn’t.

A special new friendship was formed between us. I was given glimpses into her heart and life that I hadn’t know before. Her kindness in those days helped to heal the hurts I had felt from her in times past. I felt her love melting away my pain and anger towards her, and the bitterness I had harboured. As my heart and spirit healed, so did my body.

This could have been a time when she grew more jealous of me, and in truth it was not easy for her to see the love lavished on me from our husband. Her fears of being treated of lesser value haunted her at times. But as we learned to love one another more the fears were pushed aside. There was much to talk about, much to understand. Some days we didn’t have the compassion that was needed. But we knew that we could not go back to the way things had been in the past. We sought to understand one another, and this pulled us through the difficult times.

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Hearing Samuel, my newborn, cry, I couldn't contain my own tears. The wonder of what our Lord had done for me was deeply felt. A party was held in his honor. Music, dancing, feasting! I sat close by, holding this bundle of joy in my grateful embrace, how I loved the very soul of him. He was not only a long awaited child, but a personal gift from our loving Lord. I knew His love with one look at this tender child.

All knew of my decision and commitment to give this child back in thankfulness to the One who had graciously loaned him to me. In the times when my heart ached at the thought of fulfilling my promise, not wishing to ever part from him, those around me helped to comfort me, reminding me of God's promises to fully repay. I was to be but an instrument, but a vessel, to bring a special child into this world. A child whose destiny was fore-ordained, and whose calling was a unique one. It was not my choice what he was to do with his life. He belonged to his Creator.

Samuel was strong willed from the start. When he set his mind to something there wasn't much that could be said or done that could turn him away from it. But like all us children of God, we all have to learn that submitting to His will above our own, is what will bring the greatest joy in end.

Being the first child, I was able to give him more attention than normally would have been afforded. I was grateful for the time we could spend together, both because our time together would be short, and I wanted him brought up to know our God in a real and close way. Every moment that I could I spent teaching him, or seeing that his care was the best. He was given more care than the rest, that was plain. But because of his mission and calling in life—which he mysteriously seemed to know deep within—it wasn't looked on with jealousy, the care he was given. He was here but for a time. He needed to be made ready.

Sometimes as he slept, I wept and prayed that he be given all that would be needed for the calling and plan for his life. I knew his childish instincts. I knew it would be hard to leave his family and to follow what he was ordained to do. I knew it would leave a great empty spot in my heart when the time came for him to be given up. But with all my heart I desired—even more than having a child with me—for a child of mine to please our Lord. This is the desire that grew within my heart as the days of his time with us came to a close.

We held a solemn feast, with songs and weeping, dancing and prayers—for both the joy and the sacrifice that it was to give this deeply loved treasure, back to the One whom in His love had loaned him to us.

I had to be brave for Samuel's sake. I tried to tell him of the new and special things that he would be able to do, that most children his age never would get to. I wanted him to know how special he was, to hold to his calling with reverence, and to never seek to follow elsewhere. I knew that the battles he would face as a growing young man would be hard, but I wanted to help to instil in his heart and mind that the best comes to those who give their all to our Lord and God. My prayer was that he would desire God's will above all.

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I sought to have time alone to pray, while the rest of the family ate the customary Passover meal, which was attended yearly. This was the first time I had been here since Samuel was given to me. I could not eat. I didn't feel the strength to do what I knew and was committed to doing. I went into the Temple to pray. I prayed for full yieldedness. I prayed for a deeper love for God that would give me a burning passion to fulfil what I knew to be His highest will. As I prayed I felt invisible arms of loving warmth around me. I wept at the tenderness I felt through that Heavenly embrace. As I basked in the love of Heaven I knew a supernatural courage. With renewed devotion in my heart I rose to fulfil what I came to do.

"Samuel, darling, the time has come to begin your service for God." I said with a gentle but firm voice. His eyes began to water, and he wrapped his arms around me tightly. I felt a wave of emotion stirring me, but I would not let anything stop me from caring out the commission I had. Looking into his eyes I said, "Remember, all that is given to God will come back again many more times over. Let us go and do what our Lord requires, for only then will we have full joy." I took him by then hand, and with my husband following a few paces behind, we walked to the Temple.

I had given my son a small gift pack to present to priest Eli, as well as some necessary items for his care. A supernatural surrender had come over Samuel. He walked up to Eli and said with a tone of a grown man, "I'm here to serve the Lord. I'm at your service." With this Eli bent down to look into the little boy's eyes, and with a tears in his own, took him by the hand to show him to his room.

I gave a wave, till he was out of sight. Elkanah put his arm around me and led me back to where the family was waiting. One of the other children ran up and took my hand and wanted to show me a little animal they had discovered, another gave me a hug, and another held up a piece of fruit to me. Our loving Lord's angels were surrounding me through these children.

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The year came and went more slowly than any year I'd ever known. Every day I prayed for my son to grow and mature in spirit and body, according to His plan. There was so much I wanted to see him do. I played the part that is most essential to a child's well being—the prayers that helped to hold him when my arms could not. The prayers that helped to cheer him where my smile was not seen. The prayers that taught him to obey, where my training could not be experienced. His true Father in Heaven would see to his every need, and answer my heartfelt prayers.

In my spare time I worked on prepared clothing and gifts that he would need. I made a sheep's wool coat, sandals, and a leather bag to carry his belongings in. I packed these up tenderly as we prepared for the annual journey.

So many questions flooded my mind as we neared our destination. "Was he angry with me for leaving him for so long? Would he remember me and the bond that we shared? What was he now like? Had he been treated well and had his needs met?"

One look into his awaiting eyes, as I walked in with reverence to the place I left him a year before, told me all was well. Our Lord had more than cared for him. I spoke with the priest and thanked him for the part he played in my son's life. He assured me that this child was a special one, and would do wonderful things for God. He told me that my giving was like planting a seed, that would grow into a

wonderful vine, reaching far and wide, bearing much fruit. As I watered this seed with my daily prayers, I would never be disappointed at the results.

Samuel joined us all for our time there. We talked, laughed, cried and played. He had so much to show me. Seeing his joy and satisfaction in his new life gave my heart a deep peace. I had made the right choice, and I renewed my commitment to give him to God's service—for another next year, and for the rest of his life.

I cried when it was time to return home. I knew I would miss him terribly. Though somehow I felt that our Lord, too, cried tears of gratefulness for these, his humble and yielded vessels, wanting only to be used for His glory. I would reap the benefits of His gratitude in time. I faced the road ahead and called to Heaven for the joy of life to be born in me anew.

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Samuel wasn't the only child I was blessed with. Our Lord saw fit to bless me with several more from His loving hand. I was busier than ever with the many new ones He send to me. Each one special, each one unique, each one a treasure. He did not ask me to give up the others, as it was with Samuel. But in my heart I committed each one to Him, to be used according to His plan.

Every year I took that long awaited for trip. With clothing and gifts I visited my darling son—this boy who was becoming more and more a young man of God by the year. Each year I was able to get glimpses into the effects my prayers had on his life. Though there was much evil in the world around him, his desire was on following his calling. His health was sustained. He learned how to hear God's words. He was a prophet, a called out one, and used to bring God's treasured words to those who needed them.

Life didn't treat him with kid gloves. He had his share of heartache, sorrow and loneliness, sickness and pain. But through the prayers of his family, his desire to follow his calling and to fulfil his mission for his Lord, prevailed in the face of all that sought to pull him down.

It was a living sacrifice—the kind our Lord is most pleased with. I gave of my very flesh, my heart, the thing most desired and treasured; and Samuel he gave his all. Because of it, the rewards have been more than can be numbered. In new and abundant ways have we been blessed, every day of our lives. Words can't express all that has been poured out to us from our loving Lord's grateful heart. It is us that should weep in gratitude at having the privilege of serving a God of such love and mercy—but He makes us feel as if it is us who have done Him the honor.

There is no joy that can be matched to the joy given to those who with an unreserved passion, give to Him their all. This is the joy of life!