

Pray With Desperation

NOBODY IN MY FAMILY watches Desperate Housewives. My wife and I are raising four teenage daughters, so the last thing we need is a sleazy prime-time soap opera about suburban women who consider adultery an acceptable way to cure boredom.

No thanks. I'll change the channel.

On the other hand, I do want my girls to grow up to be desperate. Not like the women who live on the fictional Wisteria Lane, but more like Hannah—the Bible's original desperate housewife. We could use a big dose of her desperation today.

Many people who have read Hannah's story (see 1 Sam. 1-2:11) wrongly assume that her anguish was born out of a selfish motive. We think she just wanted a baby, and that God answered her petition because she prayed really hard.

I don't believe her story is that shallow. So much more than a maternal instinct was at work here.

Hannah was a praying woman, and an intimate friend of God. From that place of deep fellowship she understood what was happening in her nation. She knew that Israel was backslidden, that the priests in the temple were defrauding the people, and that divine judgment was imminent.

This barren woman's desire for a baby was not born out of a need to feel good about herself. Nor was it simply an attempt to make her husband happy or to silence her contentious rival, Peninnah.

No, this had nothing to do with boosting self-esteem. Hannah was asking God to send a prophet who could bring revival to her barren land. And she was willing to be the vessel through

which that prophet could be born.

What is so amazing is that three people tried to abort the spiritual promise in her womb, yet she pressed beyond their interference and believed God anyway. Peninnah offered nothing but condemnation—taunting Hannah for her childless condition as if it could never be cured. Meanwhile, Hannah's patronizing husband, Elkanah, implored her to forget her desire for a baby and find her identity in him instead.

But the worst insult came when Hannah arrived at the church. The spiritual leader of the day, Eli the priest, didn't recognize that what was stirring inside Hannah was of the Holy Spirit.

She was so overcome by the power of the Lord that she got a bit emotional, so much so that Eli thought she was a drunken fool. He could no longer discern a Pentecostal visitation from an alcoholic stupor.

Yet Hannah did not let the insults stop her from pursuing a breakthrough. The words from Peninnah, Elkanah and Eli went in one ear and out the other, but Hannah held on to her word from God. The next time she came to that temple she carried a boy prophet in her arms who would one day call Israel to national repentance.

I want to offer a challenge to all the Hannahs who read our magazine. There is a divine call on your life, and it is so much bigger than you and the restricted place where you live now. You may feel you are spiritually barren, or that God has forsaken you. It is time to walk in faith—and to pray with desperation!

If voices of condemnation are harassing you, rebuke them. If patronizing voices are telling you to stop pursuing your dreams, politely ignore them (even if they are from those you love). And if religious voices are criticizing you (perhaps because you are a woman, or because your prayers are loud and

undignified), smile and keep storming heaven until your promise has been birthed.