

**A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church**  
**By Chris Fillingham**  
**"Hannah's Two Gifts"**  
**1 Samuel 1:9-20, 24**  
**November 18, 2018**

I want to invite each of you to take out the colorful tile you were given. Most of us have been carrying around tiles for two weeks now.

Some of us may have just gotten one this morning. But for all of us, we are asked to see this tile as a reflection of the seed of God's life planted within us... And as we held these tiles, we have been asking ourselves, ***what is it we plan to do with this one wild and precious life of ours?***

So, I want you to hold that in your hand... as we spend some time with Hannah's story. Because I think Hannah has something important to show us about our own life. Something essential about both the gifts... and the longings that shape our lives.

And by that, I'm not just talking about that longing you will have for a piece of pumpkin pie this week,  
or even that longing for the Apple watch that's going on your Christmas list this year.

No, I'm talking about that nagging yearning that is always stirring in us...  
those longings that are just beneath the surface of our lives...  
always there, in one way or another.

We human beings are longing creatures. We don't live most of our lives serene and content with only occasional moments of yearning, or occasional moments of restlessness, do we?

No, it's really the other way around, isn't it?

For most of our lives there is this restlessness just below the surface of things.  
A yearning for something... a longing that is interrupted with occasional moments of contentment and serenity. Right?

But most of the time... there is a yearning in us.

It's like there is always this fire of desire burning somewhere deep in us...

And sure, sometimes we put that restless fire down with another piece of pumpkin pie or a new toy. Or we may try to satisfy it with a change in scenery... a vacation, a new home... and that might help for just a little bit.

Maybe we even get ourselves convinced that this yearning is there because... we just need a new career... or maybe.... a new family....

Maybe a new school... or a new lover... would do the trick...  
And then we'd be content.

And so, we try one of those things... We all do this. We take another piece of the pie... and it might even work for a moment... maybe a few months even... But before long... that restless longing comes back.

Our surroundings might be different, but our yearning isn't.

It haunts our lives...

\*\*\*\*\*

Well, Hannah had a deep longing...

For her... that longing expressed itself in the form of an empty crib.

Year after year she watched as her peers and her family members had children.

**She watched as other women her age...had babies, and she watched as they nursed their little one in that sweet intimacy...**

**and they played with their little 5-year olds...**

**and they mentored their 9-year olds...**

**And the longing in Hannah for a child, just kept growing deeper.**

You see, Hannah had always imagined she'd be a mom. It was one of the things she had looked forward to in life... But even after years of marriage... it never happened...

And the pain of that... the fading dream... ached deeply in her.

Year after year that deep ache grew.

And there were tears shed,

and there was anger and questions...

But still... no baby.

It's the story of many women still today... The heartache grows as the picture of their lives... the future they had imagined... slowly begins to dissolve.

**But it is also a story about more than someone... wanting a child. In a way, it's a story that all of us experience in one way or another.**

Something doesn't happen that we had hoped for...

Or maybe something happens that we had never expected... and the way we pictured our lives unfolding... the image we had of our future changes.

That dream of ours... it might be ripped up in a moment... or it might slowly dissolve with the passing of unresolved hopes.

Something happens with our health...

something doesn't happen in our career.

Something happens in our politics,

something doesn't happen in our families.

Something happens with our finances

something doesn't happen with our lover.

And that longing...

becomes a deep ache that takes over our thoughts by day

and our dreams by night.

\*\*\*\*\*

Well, years go by for Hannah... and the aching dreams in her grow so strong... she is driven to her knees before God... there in the temple at Shiloh.

[playful here]

And she's kind of a mess when she goes there.  
Her eyes are red and puffy... her makeup all smeared. Her nose snotty. She's mumbling to herself...  
there on the floor in the corner of the temple.  
Truth be told, she kind of looks like she's been drinking like a fish.  
At least that's what the priest Eli thinks. He's pretty sure she's "four sheets to the wind."

Of course, we know she's not... but that's Eli's impression ... which tell us Hannah really is a mess  
here. She has brought the depths of all her longings to the temple. No holding back.  
She's pouring it out on the altar, in holy hopes that God will hear her.

\*\*\*\*\*

And I think that's the first thing that Hannah has to teach us this morning. This is what we are  
invited to do with our deepest longings.... whether that's a deeply broken heart... or a nagging  
restlessness.

Rather than looking for another fix to that deep yearning... Hannah invites us to bring that  
yearning... as honestly as you can to God.

After all, God already knows it's there... in you.  
God knows those questions you're asking.  
God knows the regrets you're carrying...

And God is here... just waiting... for you to be honest enough with yourself,  
and honest enough with God,  
to bring your deep longings, and hopes, and dreams... to bring all of them here... to  
the altar.

***Because, you see, the home of God  
is the place where your restlessness  
has been trying to take you all along. [repeat]***

***You were created with the fire of God's own life burning in you.***

That's part of what your tile is there to remind you about this month. The gift of your life is not about you.  
It is the gift of God's life.

It is a holy fire, a divine holy breath... planted in you.

**And all that longing of our lives... that creeps to the surface... in all kinds of ways...  
the longings of our bodies,  
the longings of our minds,  
the longings of our hearts...  
All of it... is the radiance of the fire of your soul that is driving you into God's life and love.**

And there is no amount of pumpkin pie,  
or new jobs,  
or different relationships,  
or life changes...  
that you can create that will satisfy that restless longing.

There's no amount of productivity, or money you can earn,  
or accomplishments you can reach,  
or goals you can achieve...  
or dreams you can manufacture...  
that will satisfy that longing.

Because the restlessness in you...  
comes from the ***desire for the infinite in you...***  
***Which means that anything less than the infinite will always fail to fill it.***

That restless longing... is the divine infinite life... burning deep in your soul.  
And it was planted in you... as a kind of magnetic pull... to drive you back to God.

\*\*\*\*\*

Hannah brings her deepest longings, her hopes and dreams to the temple at Shiloh. And there, she pours them out to God. She doesn't know what will happen, but she knows that *nothing else is big enough to hold them.*

And she's learning that if she keeps clinging to her ideal picture of her life, it will never happen. Ultimately, she has to surrender her longing and dreams... into the divine love and mercy.

And that's what she does.

She prays, ***"If you do give me a child... I won't hold on to what I had imagined parenthood would be. I'll bring him back here and give him to you."***

And in that moment, she is letting go of the future she had always imagined. She's letting go of the patterns that she envied in her friends and neighbors. She's giving it all up... saying, if by some miracle, she is blessed with a child, she will surrender him to God in the most profound way.

Again, in the first part of this story,

Hannah challenges us to look at the tiles we're holding in our hand, and see it in all our deep longings...

all our hopes and dreams...

and to bring them to the altar of God's love and mercy.

\*\*\*\*\*

But, there's a second part of the story that is equally important.

By some gift of God, Hannah does become pregnant. And she is given this great gift of the longed-for child. And once the child is weaned... she brings him back to Eli at Shiloh, just as she said she would. She gives him back to God... and leaves him at the temple.

So today, I want all our parents to send your children home with me.

No, thank goodness that's not the point.

If it were, I think I'd be the one weeping at the altar.

Of course, part of the invitation is for all of us parents... whether we're in our 20s or in our 80s... to somehow find a way to leave our children... with God.

And truth be told, that's so hard... hard to know when and how. But there does come a point, when each of us... no matter the child, and no matter the parent, each of us... will have to leave our beautiful sons and beautiful daughters... ***at the altar of God's profound mercy...*** and trust them into God's care.

That's what Hannah does. The great gift she has been given... she brings back to Shiloh... and offers the gifts of her life back to God.

\*\*\*\*\*

But again, this is about more than parents and children.

This is about any of the great gifts of our lives.

What Hannah does... we are called to do with ***all the great gifts*** of our lives.

And there are so many... so many, we often forget to recognize them.

**But that's the other thing I hope you see in your beautiful tile today. It is not only the fire of desire burning in you,  
it is also a picture of all the beautiful gifts that have been part of your life,  
the many gifts that have come to you.**

The family member who has loved you... and offered you grace,  
And the work that has been entrusted to you,

The home in which you lived,  
And the schools you attended,

The talents you have developed,  
And the accomplishments you have achieved,

The friendships you have cherished,  
And the joy that has found you.

There are such profound gifts that come to us... *in this one wild and precious life...*  
All of them... come to us from God.

And like Hannah, we are called to recognize that they are gifts...  
And they are gifts to surrender to God... and God's work in the world.

That's the second movement of the story.  
***And the second invitation for today.***

First, Hannah brings her hopes, and longings, and dreams  
and then she brings her treasured gifts...  
and entrusts all of them into God's profound mercy and love.

\*\*\*\*\*

And when she does that, God is able to use them in ways she never imagined. You see... Hannah's story ends here... but the story of this little boy she gave back to God... is just beginning.

He grows up to become the great prophet Samuel... who guides the people back to God again and again...  
And eventually... this little boy will anoint the very first King of Israel, King Saul.  
And when that king stops listening to God...  
it is still Hannah's boy, Samuel... that guides the future of God's people... by anointing David king  
over all Israel. David, who is still celebrated today.

**In other words, Hannah's gift profoundly shapes the future and the story of God's people in  
ways she could have never imagined....**

**All because she brought her deep longings and hopes to God,  
and brought the great gifts of her life back to God.**

\*\*\*\*\*

It seems to me that this is what Generation to Generation 2.0 has been inviting us to do.

It was just three years ago that we, as a church, were bringing some of our deep hopes to God  
with our first Generation campaign.

And now, after three years... those hopes have given birth to new life among us... and there is joy  
and gratitude... as new children's ministry is growing... and youth ministry is deepening... and prayer  
ministries and office space are enriching our life together.

And today, we're making new commitments as a way of bringing the gifts of all this... back to God.

In other words, the two campaigns... have been like the two movements of Hannah's story... We  
have brought our hopes and longings to the altar. And now we are bringing our deep gratitude and gifts...  
and surrendering them all back to God.

Today, we're trusting that whatever is to happen here at Dayspring...  
and whatever happens with our children and teenagers...  
and whatever happens in the longings and hopes for our ministry...  
and whatever gifts have come to us...

from past generations and gifts that will come to us in the future...

***It is all God's.***

***It is not ours to claim or hold onto.***

That's true for our church.

And it's also true for each one of us as individuals.

\*\*\*\*\*

So, today, I'm going to invite you to recognize that... by making the same movement as Hannah.

In just a moment, you're going to be invited to bring the tile you've been carrying... and all that  
your tile represents ...

the fire of God's life, and the gift of God's life...

the longings and yearnings that are yours...

as well as the great gifts you've been given....

bring all of that, and place it here on the altar of the communion table...

And as you place the tile on the altar,

I want to invite you to say these words:

**“God, receive my longings,  
And receive my gifts.  
All are yours.” [repeat]**

**And who knows, if we can gather both our longings and our deep gifts and bring them to God...  
then the future may just begin to be remade.**

And God may just use both our longings and our gifts...  
to change our lives,  
and our world,  
in ways we cannot yet imagine.  
Amen.

Silent Reflection:

*“The freedom to give generously and to live free from anxiety is founded on the conviction that not just our things, but our very selves belong to God” ~ DeYoung*

Pause at the table. As you place your tile with the others, pray:

**“God, receive my longings,  
And receive my gifts.  
All are yours.”**

Then move to the sides to receive communion.