

# Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S. LAMPEL

## A Mother's Love



## for God

*We live in a time of illusion. Things, and especially people, are not what they seem. Things like character, honesty, reliability, trustworthiness, uprightness are, in so many people we meet or observe, built only of vapor. They say all the right words, but there is no truth behind them.*

*Individuals are not held to what they say. Politicians lie through their teeth and are never called on it. People routinely break the promises they have made; married couples routinely break their vows made before God and man.*

*Integrity, today, is an antiquated ideal.*

*Old-fashioned.*

*Naive.*

*Throughout history, however, there have been individuals who kept their promises, who did indeed have integrity.*



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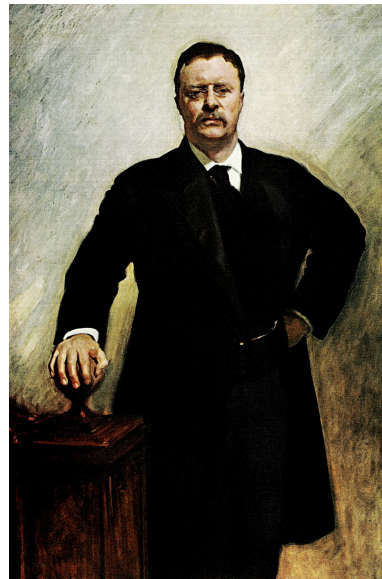
# Integrity

IT WAS ELECTION NIGHT, 1904.

Theodore Roosevelt was poised to win the White House by an unprecedented landslide. In that moment, at the height of his political power and popularity, he committed one of history's greatest political blunders.

Roosevelt had come into office upon the assassination of his predecessor, William McKinley. Subsequently he had enjoyed more than three years of a popular term, was robustly healthy and, at forty-six, still in the prime of life. In those years, there was no legal limit to the number of terms a President could serve. The Twenty-second Amendment to the United States Constitution, which would have limited Roosevelt to only one elected term, after he had assumed such a large portion of McKinley's term, would not be ratified until 1951. So, though the tradition had been that a president not run for more than two terms, Roosevelt was free to run for two more full terms—or more.

Yet, that night, with his flabbergasted wife and supporters standing off to the side, the President declared to a roomful of reporters that



...he would consider the three-and-a-half years between September 1901 and March 1905 as equivalent to a full first term, in the sense that George Washington had understood such things. “The wise custom which limits the President to two terms regards the substance and not the form,” he continued. “Under no circumstances will I be a candidate for, or accept another, nomination.”

With that one sentence Roosevelt signed his political demise, turning himself into a lame duck President before even beginning his first elected term.

Later, to Hermann Kohlsaatt, Roosevelt reportedly said, “I would cut my hand off right there,” laying his finger on his wrist, “if I could recall that...statement.” For you see, he *had* said it, said it publicly, and he would stand by those ill-fated words. Though he may have had moments in which he regretted the utterance, there was never any

thought given to renege on the promise; it simply was not an option. In a letter to his friend, Owen Wister, Roosevelt later wrote:

It is a peculiar gratification to me to have owed my election...to Abraham Lincoln's "plain people"; to the folk who work hard on farm, in shop, or on the railroads, or who own little stores, little businesses which they manage themselves. I would literally, not figuratively, rather cut off my right hand than forfeit by any improper act of mine the trust and regard of these people. I may have to do something of which they will disapprove, because I deem it absolutely right and necessary; but most assuredly I shall endeavor not to merit their disapproval by any act inconsistent with the ideal they have formed of me.

*Quotations from T.R.: The Last Romantic,  
by H.W. Brands.*



God's word is filled with liars and rascals, but also with people of integrity: Joseph, sold into bondage, who would not give into the tempting seductions of the wife of his boss; Jonathan, son of Saul, who held true to his friend David, though such loyalty jeopardized his future as the next king; Abigail, who went against her loathsome husband and risked her life to do the right thing.

And then there was Hannah.

# The Promise

**I**N ANCIENT CULTURES, and no less in Israel, it was a matter of public, humiliating shame for a wife to have borne no children. Rachel, the wife of Jacob, was so distraught over her barren state that she cried out to her husband, “Give me children, or else I die!” The bearing of children was so important to women that it was considered an acceptable remedy for the woman’s maid to give birth to children in her place. The wife’s shame would then be removed, though physically the birth would have taken place through one of her servants. Thus Rachel offered her maid Bilhah to Jacob.

Rachel was Jacob’s favorite wife, but Leah was his first. Leah bore the first four of the tribal leaders of Israel, but when she thought she could no longer bear children, she gave *her* maid Zilpah to her husband.

When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Leah’s maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, “How fortunate!” So she named him Gad. Leah’s maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, “Happy am I! For women will call me happy.” So she named him Asher.

*Genesis 30:9-13*

Four of the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel were born of Jacob’s slaves.



Later in the history of Israel, during the period of transition from theocracy and judges to a monarchy, another favorite wife was suffering under the same cloud of shame.

She said, “Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children.” So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Then Rachel said, “God has vindicated me, and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son.” Therefore she named him Dan. Rachel’s maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. So Rachel said, “With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed.” And she named him Naphtali.

*Genesis 30:3-8*

*“My heart exults in the Lord;  
My horn is exalted in the Lord.  
My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies,*

*Because I rejoice in Your salvation.  
There is no one holy like the Lord,  
Indeed, there is no one besides You,*

Now there was a certain man from Ramathaim-zophim from the hill country of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives: the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. Now this man would go up from his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the LORD of hosts in Shiloh... When the day came that Elkanah sacrificed, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters; but to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, but the LORD had closed her womb.

*1 Samuel 1:1-5*

At that point in the history of Israel, Shiloh was the location of Yahweh worship in Israel, with the tent of meeting eventually being replaced by a relatively permanent structure. It was in this center of worship that Eli the priest presided with his two reprehensible sons, Hophni and Phinehas.

Hannah suffered not just the public shame of being barren, but also the ridicule and abuse of her husband's fertile wife, Peninnah. Particularly when the family would travel to Shiloh, to make offerings and worship the Lord, Hannah would suffer this abuse from her rival, to the point that she was unable to eat, and wept all the day.

It may be difficult for us today to appreciate Hannah's predicament, her mental and emotional state. It is true that

there remain today cultures in which a barren woman would still experience a level of shame similar to Hannah's, but not in the western world. Of course a woman desiring to have children can still experience the disappointment, even frustration and sorrow of such inability, but the community she inhabits will not look down on her as a veritable pariah. Today in the western world she may know their sadness for her plight, but she will not know their scorn.

In Hannah's time and place she would have been considered by others—especially other women—to be less than a dutiful wife, and without her own children she would be considered less than a full woman. The shame of this she bore day after day, year after year.



On one of the family's annual pilgrimages to Shiloh, Hannah was again overcome with grief over her barrenness. Out of that grief, however, was revealed the heart of a woman, the heart of a mother who loved the Lord God more than herself, more than any answer He might give to her anguished plea. In her prayer that day in Shiloh Hannah went one step further than just being obedient to what Jesus would later cite as "the great and foremost commandment."

*Nor is there any rock like our God.  
Boast no more so very proudly,  
Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth;*

*For the Lord is a God of knowledge,  
And with Him actions are weighed.  
The bows of the mighty are shattered,*

[Moses said,] "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up."

*Deuteronomy 6:5-7*

She, greatly distressed, prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly. She made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head."

*1 Samuel 1:10-11*

In her prayer and vow Hannah did not just promise to teach her son the way of the Lord, but she would literally *give her son* to the Lord.



*But the feeble gird on strength.  
Those who were full hire themselves out for bread  
But those who were hungry cease to hunger.*

*Even the barren gives birth to seven,  
But she who has many children languishes.  
The Lord kills and makes alive;*

# The Sacrifice of Praise

THE NAME “SAMUEL” means “heard of God.” Hannah prayed to Yahweh to give her a son; He heard her prayer and answered by giving her a son. So she named the boy Samuel, “because I have asked him of the Lord.”



How many desperate, petrified soldiers in foxholes have made promises to God if only he would get them out alive? How many promised to stop cussing, stop drinking, live a righteous life, become a priest, if only he would protect them from certain death in the encompassing battle? The question answers itself: more than can be counted or known.

And we needn't restrict the question to the extreme duress of war, however. How many individuals in the normal ebb and flow of life have cried out to the Lord for just about anything, promising one thing or another if He would only fulfill their request? And then, regarding any of these, we might ask the obvious: How many kept their promise to the Lord after He did what they asked? Just a guess: rather few.

Hannah would be numbered among them. The name she gave her son would have been a sufficient reminder of what she had promised. But I doubt that was necessary. Her devotion to the Lord rivaled that of Abraham, who waited many years to have a son through Sarah. When that son was finally granted him at a very old age, he unflinchingly obeyed when the Lord tested him by requiring the boy back as a sacrifice—with the angel of the Lord stopping him only after the knife was already in his hand.

The Lord God had at long last answered her plea, not just for a child, but a *male* child. The Lord opened her womb and gave her a son. After all this time who would have faulted Hannah for reneging on her promise and clutching the boy to her for the rest of her life.

Hannah wisely kept her son at home until he was weaned; a child that had not yet been weaned would have been only an unnecessary burden on Eli the priest of the house of the Lord. But even in stating her reason for this delay she acknowledged that she had not forgot her promise.

*He brings down to Sheol and raises up.  
The Lord makes poor and rich;  
He brings low, He also exalts.*

*He raises the poor from the dust,  
He lifts the needy from the ash heap  
To make them sit with nobles,*



Then the man Elkanah went up with all his household to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "I will not go up until the child is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD and stay there forever."

*1 Samuel 1:21-22*



Hannah, unbeknownst to her, was demonstrating a gospel order to her love. Jesus pronounced the radical nature of love when He said,

"He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me."

*Matthew 10:37-38*

Jesus was just restating for His new covenant that which had begun the old.



"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

*Deuteronomy 6:4-5*

Hannah's focused, extravagant love for and devotion to Yahweh rose above her love for family—even her desperately wished for son. She would gladly, with words of worship and praise, dedicate her son Samuel to the Lord: literally, physically, relinquish him to God.

Then they slaughtered the bull, and brought the boy to Eli. She said, "Oh, my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the LORD. For this boy I prayed, and the LORD has given me my petition which I asked of Him. So I have also dedicated him to the LORD; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

*1 Samuel 1:25-28*

The first act of this story concludes

*And inherit a seat of honor;  
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,  
And He set the world on them.*

*He keeps the feet of His godly ones,  
But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness;  
For not by might shall a man prevail.*

with a poetic resonance. Hannah gives her son to the Lord, then Elkanah, her husband worships the Lord as the head of the family. Finally Hannah, filled with the joy of the Lord, sings her adoration and praise in the song that immediately follows.

Then Hannah prayed and said,  
“My heart exults in the Lord;  
My horn is exalted in the Lord,  
My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies,  
Because I rejoice in Your salvation.  
There is no one holy like the Lord,  
Indeed, there is no one besides You,  
Nor is there any rock like our God.  
Boast no more so very proudly,  
Do not let arrogance come out of your mouth;  
For the Lord is a God of knowledge,  
And with Him actions are weighed.  
The bows of the mighty are shattered,  
But the feeble gird on strength.  
Those who were full hire themselves out for bread,  
But those who were hungry cease to hunger.  
Even the barren gives birth to seven,  
But she who has many children languishes.  
The Lord kills and makes alive;  
He brings down to Sheol and raises up.  
The Lord makes poor and rich;  
He brings low, He also exalts.  
He raises the poor from the dust,  
He lifts the needy from the ash heap  
To make them sit with nobles,  
And inherit a seat of honor;  
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s,

And He set the world on them.  
He keeps the feet of His godly ones,  
But the wicked ones are silenced in darkness;  
For not by might shall a man prevail.  
Those who contend with the Lord will be shattered;  
Against them He will thunder in the heavens,  
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;  
And He will give strength to His king,  
And will exalt the horn of His anointed.”

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Hannah kept her promise, and she never changed her mind by returning to Shiloh to take Samuel back. She *did* return year after year to bring her growing boy a new robe, and on such occasions would receive the blessings of the priest, who prayed that the Lord would give her more children—which He graciously did.

Now Samuel was ministering before the LORD, as a boy wearing a linen ephod. And his mother would make him a little robe and bring it to him from year to year when she would come up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, “May the LORD give you children from this woman in place of the one she dedicated to the LORD.” And they went to their own home. The LORD visited Hannah; and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew before the LORD.

1 Samuel 2:18-21



*Those who contend with the Lord will be shattered;  
Against them He will thunder in the heavens,  
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;*

*And He will give strength to His king,  
And will exalt the horn of His anointed.”  
1 Samuel 2:1-10*

We live in a time of illusion and duplicity, but we need not be a participant. We need not subscribe to that fraudulent lifestyle. We can dare to be different.

Followers of Christ have more reason than the rest in this

fallen world to be true to our word, for we are to reflect His righteousness to those in need of the Savior.

Dare to live what you believe.

Dare to live what you say.



We give Thee but Thine own,  
Whate'er the gift may be;  
All that we have is Thine alone,  
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.

May we Thy bounties thus  
As stewards true receive,  
And gladly, as Thou blessest us,  
To Thee our first fruits give.

To comfort and to bless,  
To find a balm for woe,  
To tend those lost in loneliness  
Is angels' work below.

The captive to release,  
To God the lost to bring,  
To teach the way of life and peace—  
It is a Christ-like thing.

And we believe Thy word,  
Though dim our faith may be.  
Whate'er for Thine we do, O Lord,  
We do it unto Thee.

Amen.

*William W. How*