

## Hannah's Heart Chapter Nine - Prayer Changes Things

February 4, 2020



Abraham Hostetler turned the over-sized key in the aging lock and pulled once, twice, on the long, brass handle. With a sudden moan, the over-sized front door of the old church gave in to his coaxing, and a rush of cool air met him from the interior. A slightly musty smell came with it. *Need to get Mrs. Toothill to order more of that spray again. Carpet's sucking up the moisture with all this rain we've had lately.* His mind started a checklist of things to do before he even set foot in the ancient narthex.

Abram flipped on the nearest light switch and padded his way to his office. Another blast of air met him, this time overly warm.

*All praise to You, Lord, that we even have heat,* he prayed, eyes closing in the effort to suppress any bit of the frustration that rose so easily in him.

*I'll have to put a sign on that thermostat again. People are forgetting to turn it back down before they leave.* He added another item to the never-ending inventory. No matter the time of year, the building had a penchant for being damp and cold. One of the many mixed blessings of a mid-19th century, stone-covered edifice, he realized.

His job as combination Pastor, counselor, and quasi-janitor to the church seemed to encompass more hats lately. Thankfully, the church congregation was small, as some churches go. And he still had the strength to minister first and pay attention to the physical plant problems later. They had a man who volunteered to clean and upkeep the building, but he worked a full-time job and wasn't able to be available as much as Abram might have wished.

*Good man, though. Good man. Works hard with the time he has to give,* Abram assented as he entered the small room.

He sighed a little as he entered his workspace.

*Thirty-six years now, Lord.* Nostalgia swarmed over him for a moment as he remembered the day's date. *You've had me here for more than half my life.*

He gazed around fondly at the crammed, tiny office. A testimony to those years, the room hosted floor-to-ceiling bookshelves filled with Truth, wisdom—and a little conjecture. Most of the books were well-read, yet a few still waited to be explored. A file cabinet stuffed with records and sermons and stray office supplies stood positioned too near the steam radiator, silently rusting away around the edges. The requisite Spider plant hung from the nine-foot ceiling by a macramé cord—a handcrafted gift from one of the women given to him many, many years ago.

“Dear Sadie Mae. She and I were quite a pair back in the 60's, weren't we, Lord?” He chuckled to himself, reminiscing his earlier Jesus Freak days and the folks who had joined him to start his first Bible study.

“If only we'd known back then.” He shook his head a moment. “But I'm afraid we had a little too much 'freak' and not enough 'Jesus' in us at the time, didn't we, dear?” He addressed the now-deceased woman as he picked up a watering can to care for the plant. His eyes grew soft with the memories.

“We learned, though. We learned. Didn't we, Lord?”

A short, saggy couch slouched along one paneled wall, and a few folding chairs were stored neatly in the corner behind the door. Two tall, stained glass windows rose up behind the wide oak desk he occupied for hours at a time, letting in just enough light to keep the room from being swathed in darkness. A selection of family photos, as well as his Certificate of Ordination, hung proudly (albeit, just a tad crooked) on the opposite wall from where he entered. And an oscillating fan hid behind the far arm of the couch.

He ran his hand along the wall until it reached the light and flipped the switch. An ancient ceiling fan sprang to life, whirring its blades like a flock of startled turkeys. He hurried to turn the new dimmer attachment Horace had installed the other day to 'low'.

"Oh, Lord, my Lord," he prayed out loud this time. "Thank You that I have helpers. That I have willing hands when I need them."

Truly thankful this time, as any sense of irritation had flowed away with the first attitude adjustment of the day, he smiled to himself. Joyed that the Lord was so near, so ready to help him any time he called.

The Core would be arriving in another hour or two. Well, at least the older, retired members; they were the ones that were available on an early weekday. It was Wednesday. And every Wednesday just a tiny portion of his beloved flock would meet with him to lift up the others in the congregation to the very Throne Room of God. All the needs, the lacks, the sicknesses, the hard times would be given up in earnest supplication; all the prayers and yearnings for these dear souls spoken with firm expectancy that they were being heard and answered.

And then the praise.

The worship.

One-on-one with the Lover of their Hearts, Jesus.

How many times had they brought Heaven itself down to walk among them—or perhaps it was the other way around? Abram wasn't always sure. He just knew that the relationship he and these precious few had found with the King of the Universe was something he wouldn't trade for all the wonders of the Earth. How he longed for all the dear souls under his shepherding to find this place, this union! How he longed to open the eyes of the whole church to the intimate, loving Savior they knew—yet still didn't know.

Not yet. Not really.

"We're working on 'em though, aren't we, Lord? I see softening. I see more love growing here."

Thankfully, the younger ones were starting to wake up again.

He rubbed his forehead with one hand, thinking about the last upheaval the congregation had gone through some years back; a horrible time in their history.

"Satan sure thought he was going to have a victory there, didn't he? Sure glad You're my King, not him.

"Sure glad, Lord."

He moved around the room setting up the folding chairs, measuring out grinds for a pot of coffee, laying out cups and white plastic spoons.

*Mrs. Wilcox will be sure to bring a treat of some sort. He smiled ruefully to himself. I'm afraid I'm probably more thankful for them than I should be, Lord. Maybe You could be helping me today to remember restraint? After all, I don't have my precious Nancy here anymore to keep an eye on my sweet tooth.*

His smile fell just a little at the thought. *Not that I'd want her here instead of with You, Lord! He hurried to amend his prayer. No, no. She'd done her share of suffering for the Kingdom by the time You sent for her. I'm glad she's up there, dancing in the streets and singing with the angels.*

A deep sigh swept through him.

*It's just ...*

Well, life is what it is, now. He wouldn't change things for his own selfishness.

All the preparations in place, he hurried to walk the steps downstairs to the tiny bathrooms, making sure there were sufficient supplies there as well and to get water for the coffee.

*It's just*, he continued his soliloquy, *for a while there I thought us old folks were going to just die off and the whole church would collapse back into... Well.*

He shook his head and sighed again.

Just “church”.

He stood and reflected on that a while. He'd been there, long ago. But “church” had never been enough for him. And as he grew into manhood, away from the teachings of the chapel he'd grown up in, he sought to know: IS there more? IS it possible to know the Lord the way David spoke of in the Psalms? The way the Disciples did? The way Paul told the Ephesians? The way Jesus knew the Father?

“And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in Him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love; and may you be able to feel and understand, as all God's children should, how long, how wide, how deep, and how high His love really is; and to experience this love for yourselves, though it is so great that you will never see the end of it or fully know or understand it. And so, at last you will be filled up with God Himself.” He quoted the beloved Scripture words back to His Redeemer.

Yes, it was possible. Not only possible, but the Lord had been leading him and his Core deeper and deeper into that very understanding, just as Paul had said He would. It had been a fight over the years. Satan had tried to divide, destroy, distort, and deceive his people over and over again—and had succeeded several times. New people would come in with their own ideas, their own agendas. Murmurings would start, critical judging, gossip—those sins whose vast proportions most Christians never fully understand. Sides would be taken, “He's right, you're wrong.” And so on. The church had literally split three times now over the past 36 years.

Once just as he had started seeing things blossom.

That had been a very hard blow, nearly knocking the wind of Hope out of him. Nearly tempting him to walk away, hardly before he'd gotten started. Not a whole year after he and Nancy had taken the position at the church, the naysayers finished their job of dividing the people and left, taking a whole chunk of the congregation away.

The Lord helped him understand that it had been essentially a spiritual spring cleaning, actually orchestrated by Yahweh Himself. He'd wanted to give Abram a good running start.

In spite of the fluctuations of the congregation at large, the Lord had always been faithful to the Core. It was as though He had wrapped them 'round with a powerful angelic protection that could not be breached. Not as long as they stood firm against sin and pressed in with the Lord, relying on His will to spare them the brunt of the vicious spiritual attacks—for that was truly what these things were.

And each time, once the dust settled and they could take a clear look at what had happened, they found that it was always the naysayers and the weak ones that were gone. Tragic, yes. More reason to pray, certainly. But Jesus had always, always picked it all up again from there and started building His church with people who were seeking Him. Not power. Not amusement. Not status, or position, or attention.

No. In every renewal of members coming in, there were always the few that had really found the Kingdom. And these, like iron drawn to a magnet, had joined to the Core and swelled the heart of the church even more.

Finished with his preparations, Abram sat at the old desk with head bowed and hands over his face in reverence, now preparing his heart even more carefully than he had the room.

“Welcome to Your home within my heart today, my precious Lord.”

In the quiet, the clock sang out a mechanical version of In the Garden, announcing the hour.

*Thank You, Lord.* He smiled to himself. *How like You. How very, very like You.*  
He began his time of prayer.

“Come now into the Garden of my Heart, oh my Lord and King.”

With arms lifted to the Heavens, he continued to pray.

“May You find it filled with fragrant blooms, pleasant resting places and the scent of cinnamon and myrrh, sweet smelling spices ascending to Your Throne.

“I welcome You today, Beloved Savior of my Soul. Help me each moment as I walk with You, please.

“Just as You are mine... I am Yours.”



Karen awoke to the sound of a dresser drawer closing. Metal hangers *screeeked* as they were slid along a metal rod. The tiny clink, clink, cling-cling-cling-cling of one dropped and rocking to its final rest on the wooden floor stirred her to open her eyes.

Mike was standing in front of an opened suitcase on the other side of the bed, folding a shirt that was obviously destined to join half a dozen others already there.

“What are you doing?” she asked sleepily. She hadn’t come back to bed until nearly 3:00, having cuddled up in her chair and cried as much of the tension and pain away as she could. For a reason she didn’t understand, she had found solace in the stillness last night. At one point, it had felt as if an unseen blanket had been placed around her; a warming tenderness floating in the air of the deserted room.

Strange things like that been happening lately. Peace coming over her unexpectedly. Comfort coming from a source she thought she should recognize but lay too far back in her memory for her to bring back except in the dim, fuzzy world between waking and sleeping.

She picked her head up far enough to peer at the alarm clock’s numbers and blinked a few times to clear her blurry eyes. 6:00 a.m. She was sure that’s what the readout said.

Mike never got up this early.

“I was gonna tell you last night,” he began explaining. “But then you brought up that church thing again, and I got mad, and...”

“Tell me what?” She closed her eyes again, annoyed to be woken up so early. The lack of sleep and reminder of their latest fight wasn’t helping any.

“Tell me what??” she repeated, a little more stridently. “What are you packing clothes for? What are you doing?”

Now he was annoyed, too—he’d thought he was being super quiet. He shoved the last shirt in the suitcase, flopped the lid over, and started feeling for the zipper pull.

“I got a job.”

“What do you mean? You have a job.”

“No, no, not that. That’s for suckers. I got a job, a real one.”

The zipper stuck halfway around. He ripped at it, it advanced to the last corner and the pull came off in his hand. Miraculously, he didn’t throw it against the wall.

“I got a job, Karen—you won’t believe this one!”

Karen sighed and rolled to sit on her side of the bed.

“I didn’t believe the last one, if you remember.”

“Well, this one is gonna prove me right. You wait. You’ll see.”

“Okay.”

“I’m tellin’ you, this one is gonna make us rich again, Karen.”

“Okay, Mike. Okay. But what’s the suitcase about?”

He didn’t answer, so she turned to face him now. His face was fighting to keep his mouth shut, while his mind raced to decide how much to spill right now.

“I have to meet with these men in New York City. To train with them. They’ve promised me good money, Karen. They even put a deposit in our bank last night. You’ll see! It’s enough for you guys to live on the whole time I’m gone.”

That last part got her attention.

“What do you mean ‘the whole time’? Just how long *is* this training?”

He’d better make this good. “Only a couple weeks, from what they said.”

He lifted the suitcase from the bed, and turned to the closet again, pulling out his one good suit jacket.

“They’re gonna take me to J. Press and buy me some real clothes, too. What do you think of that? I’ll be meeting with some real important men in some high swanky offices...”

He stopped and looked at her, pleading.

“I’m good at what I do, Karen. I’m good. It’s about time I get back what’s mine. What’s ours. This is gonna be it, Karen. I know it. I just know it.”

She didn’t have an answer to that. She’d been slowly seeing him for what he was, what he’d become over the years, ever since they’d moved back to Pa. And she just wasn’t sure if she liked it. Who knew if this would be a good thing—or a bad one?

He turned back to the suitcase. Hoisting it off the floor, he looked at her one last time.

“I knew you wouldn’t want to drive me to the train station this early. I asked Jimmy Hechts to drive me over. See? I do care about you. I was even gonna let you sleep.”

His heart ran to her. His pride clamped his feet tight to where he was standing.

She got up from the bed, walked around and put her arms around him, hugging him with as much as she could muster.

“I love you, too, Mike. Thanks for thinking of me. I would have taken you—I would have.” She looked up and smiled.

“I hope this really is what you want. I hope you’ll be happy.”

Victory! Smiling now, he assured her, “I’ll call your cell every night—make sure you keep it plugged in! You’ll see, Karen. I’ll make good again, and this time I won’t need any phony religion garbage, either. I can do this on my own. You’ll see.”

A horn tapped outside, and they could hear the chugging motor through the window. He gave her a quick squeeze and a short kiss, then walked out of the room.

Karen sank down on the bed confused, wondering at the queer feelings inside of her. Part of her was hurt—like a finger had gone missing all of a sudden. But then, *this wasn’t forever, after all? That’s what he’d said. And he wasn’t leaving her. This would be good—a good thing.*

A more startling thought rose up.

*Now what was she going to do with the kids?*

She started to panic—until she remembered something else he’d said.

*“They even put a deposit in the bank last night.”*

Now she wondered just how much this deposit was. She wondered if she could get away with quitting her job. That’s what they’d fought about, too. She didn’t want to work. She wanted to be home, to be a mother again. She hadn’t been much of one lately—she didn’t deny that. But she wanted to be.

She could still remember the sweet, tender days of Hanna's childhood. Of Evan's. They pulled at her, ripping her heart apart when she gave them enough time. Pain had consumed her for more than half of Hanna's life, and Death had nearly taken her along with it.

But there was something about being back Home. Back where her roots were. Back among the people she'd grown up with. Back with her own mother. It had renewed a spark in her heart, and when she allowed it, it flamed and grew, little bit by little bit. She wanted to stay home and be a mother, just like she'd dreamed of being as a child. Just like her mother had been.

Pale, pink light came suddenly into the room. The sun was beginning to rise. She stood to part the curtains, to look out at the brightening sky. She was so tired. So worn out. But she had no idea how to do even the next thing. Numbly, she watched the sun climb over the tree line, trying to make at least one thought come into focus.

**She didn't like the one that did.**

*He was trying to sneak out of the house.*

The realization dropped her into the rocking chair beside her.

*He didn't want to say goodbye, to tell me where he was going. He had no intention of telling me anything!*

*What if? How—? Why? What about—?* Like a spinning top, her thoughts twirled around and around; never landing, never forming well enough to ponder.

Until they landed on one that had once been her strength.

God! My God!

*If You're there anywhere...*

*Dear GOD, can You still hear me?*

She was too exhausted emotionally to even cry.

*I don't know what to do. What am I going to do?*

She lay her head back against the high back of the chair and moaned.

*Are You there, God? Please. Please take this pain away. I can't stand it anymore.*

*What am I going to do...?*



Adonai looked up at Ikaia, one hand still tenderly on Karen's forehead. He had put her back to sleep in preparation for the removal. Ikaia nodded once to him and stood back, ready for his part.

The order had been given: it was to come out today.

One long pull and Adonai handed it to him now—a long, black-handled, wicked-looking spear. It had been thrown six Earth years ago piercing the spiritual heart of Ikaia's charge, wounding and crippling her, reducing her capacity to accept love and love in return. There were others there as well—one even larger than this one. But more work needed to be done before they could be touched.

It would happen. The Father had ordained it.

Rafal and his assistants moved to lay cloths soaked in a bright red substance over the wounded place and pour a clear ointment from a beautiful crystal bottle. Almost immediately in response to these administrations, the wound lost its angry appearance, the edges lost their jaggedness and became smooth again.

“Jehovah Rapha, Almighty God Who Heals. We have covered this lesion with Your Son's Blood and washed it with Adonai's tears. All honor and glory and praise unto You, El Elyon, for You alone are Holy and Powerful.”

Ikaia's cries of praise and worship resounded through the heavens, reaching the Throne of He Who sits there, rising as a pleasing incense that flowed throughout His sanctuary.

Light flowed through Rafal's hands now and spiritual tissue knit back together, reformed, and closed the gaping hole the spear had made. Further ointments of healing were smoothed on the place carefully until, finally satisfied with his work, he moved back and away from Karen's body.

Ikaia continued his petition.

**"Banish now, O Jah, the evil minion that would reopen this wound, that it never be freed to do harm to one of Your children again."**

With one swift, smooth motion, Ikaia cast the spear deep into the bowels of the Earth. He drew his sword and slashed through the body of the demon that had just been expelled, severing it from the ability to continue its work against her—consigning it to the Abyss until its master would, perhaps, release it to find a new body to indwell.

His eyes flamed at the group of evil ones that remained, cowering.

**"You are forbidden to touch her again this day. You are chained from casting any additional weapons against her. Do not defy the Great and Powerful Jehovah in this—or you will rue the decision."**

Ikaia drew himself up to his full nine-foot height, his eyes boring into them until they hid their eyes from his.

**"Decide now. Obey—or be thrown into the Lake of Fire immediately, eternally."**

A series of sounds, ranging from high-pitched squeals to guttural growls, was his answer. Satisfied, he sheathed his sword again and turned to Rafal.

**"Thank you, Friend, for your fine work here. We will continue our watch over her now."**

His eyes roamed over the four other angels that accompanied him on this most important mission. They solemnly nodded their heads, ever watchful, ever ready to spring into action should Yahweh's orders be breeched in any measure.



**"The Lord has her in His hands, Anne."**

Abram's shaggy eyebrows drew together, emphasizing his words. "He has all of them. You know that." The soothing words were like droplets of rain on her heart. "Press in with Him. Press in today in prayer—we'll all join you. He has a magnificent plan in the works here."

Yes. She knew all those things. And most of the time, she was at rest in that knowing. But the warfare in and around her home had been fierce lately. Backlash, she supposed. Retaliation from the enemy of her soul for the non-stop petitions ascending from her little prayer room over her daughter, her grandchildren, and her stubborn, blind son-in-law.

She blinked back warm tears as she gratefully accepted the cup of coffee from her Pastor. He'd been her mentor through many, many trials over the years. And his words again took the pain from her heart and pointed her towards the True answer she'd been seeking.

Faith. Hope. Trust. In the only One Who sees all and could make the tangled threads of their lives weave the most brilliant tapestry!

Even though the only side she could see right now was the confusing back side.

In time, it would turn over and reveal all its beauty. She had a lifetime of experience with the Lord's goodness and mercy to firmly believe that.

**"Yes. Thank you, dear Abram."**

Her eyes spoke the volumes of gratitude her words couldn't express.

**"We'll all press in together. Thank God for His children gathering here ..."**

The *snaap*, creak of the front door opening and quiet voices approaching turned their attention to the rest of the group arriving.

“Here, they’re coming now.” Her smile had returned, bathing her face with peace again. “Let’s see what Margaret has baked for us today, shall we?”

