

BOOK

Life²

WITH
LUCAS

DAILY READINGS
THROUGHOUT THE YEAR

JEFF LUCAS

CWR

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Contents

Introduction	5
Independence Days?	7
Friendly Fire	61
Rediscovering Jesus	115
Singing in the Rain	171
Elijah: Prophet at a loss	227
Seven – Those deadly sins	281

Introduction

Living in Colorado means that every day, when it comes to the weather, comes as a surprise. The locals have a saying: 'If you don't like the weather, just wait 15 minutes.' It really is that changeable. Last week we were sunning ourselves in high temperatures and smiling at gorgeous blue skies; this morning it's cold, rainy and snow is expected. Everything changes so suddenly.

And so it is with life. Personally, I'd like to vote for non-stop sunny days where all is joy, worries don't gather like storm clouds, and the outlook is endlessly summery. But real life brings unexpected downpours and sometimes frightening lightning strikes. The laugh-out-loud birthdays, the tearfully joyful weddings and the days when life seems just as it should be, are punctuated by other times of stress, sickness and sadness. The Lord promises us that we will have joy and trouble both. No one is excluded. Life is seasonal.

That's why it's so vital that those who follow Jesus know His Word and His ways. We must be prepared for the unanticipated seasons of life that all experience. To be caught without an umbrella in a sudden monsoon is foolish, but not tragic. To find ourselves

caught in an eclipse-of-the-sun-type tragedy without a torch would be dangerous. Scripture offers us wise counsel and direction on the basic educational necessity required of those who are breathing: how to do life.

Through this second compilation of *Life Every Day*, I pray that you'll be informed, challenged, inspired and, yes, amused at times. I've decided that life is far too serious to be taken seriously all the time, and so as I share some of my own follies and foibles along the way (I've got no shortage of material, sadly) I pray that this journey we share together will be one of strength and enjoyment, and that we really will discover that God's Word is a lamp to our feet.

So thanks for joining me. May God's truth strengthen us for the winter times. And if it's summer in your life right now, I'm glad. Just remember the sunscreen.

God bless you

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeff Lucas". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jeff Lucas

Independence Days?

Independence Days?

As we think about 'Independence Days?' and look at the world of Samuel and Saul, we come to a blockbuster of a story that is loaded with drama, jealousy, corruption, nepotism, swashbuckling bravery, fear and treachery. We have an exciting journey ahead of us. Most of all, we catch a glimpse of a few very real people who tried – with varying degrees of success – to live for God in a confusing time when the trend was for everyone to do their own thing. Sound familiar?

Israel was in a mess. The nation was morally fog bound. Religion had become a pick-n-mix, suit yourself affair. The strict rules for the Levitical priesthood had been relaxed and there were numerous shrines where worshippers paid little heed to the old Mosaic regulations. Even at the Mosaic shrine at Shiloh, standards had slipped badly. Eli the priest was in charge there and despite the fact that he 'judged Israel forty years' (1 Sam. 4:18, AV), his home was in disarray.

Israel was in survival mode, living as she was never designed to live. Independent of God, ignoring His commands, oblivious to their need for

His help, the people were headstrong and proud. Four intriguing characters emerge during this troubled time: Hannah, her miracle son Samuel, the tempestuous Saul and his son Jonathan.

As we consider them and their world, let's embrace the invitation to make out own declarations of independence – upon God – each and every day. And as we realise that's it's not just about beginning well, but about continuing on and finishing well too, we will remember Christianity is a marathon, not a sprint.

Thank you so much for joining me.

Yesterday need not dominate today – or tomorrow

1 Samuel 1:1–8
Jeremiah 29:11–12

We are all
shaped by our
past and many
of us carry
bruises that
persist

Weekend

We Christians are adept at looking as though we are good, respectable and fairly together. But sometimes, behind the veneer, fierce battles rage. Samuel had a home that was a long-term war zone.

His mother, Hannah, had lived for too long with unfulfilled hope. She was unable to conceive – and spent her days in the bizarre cauldron of tension that is a polygamous marriage. Her husband's other wife, Peninnah, was equipped with a fertile womb (her name means 'prolific'!) and an acid tongue. And Hannah's own marriage was challenging. Elkanah was fairly insensitive and clumsy, dispensing words of 'comfort' to his grieved wife that probably cut her deeply. The simmering rivalry would have stained the atmosphere daily. Samuel didn't remain in this home for long but his early childhood was nevertheless spent in a turbulent relational triangle.

We are all shaped by our past and many of us carry bruises that persist. Without making light of the debilitating power of our history, we do not have to be dominated by it. Hannah was not alone in her struggles and neither are we. Ask God to make this a new year of healing from the hurts of yesterday, coupled with fresh hope for tomorrow.

When your fellow worshippers think you're drunk

BIG PICTURE:
1 Samuel 1:9–18
Matthew 27:11–14

FOCUS:

‘How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine.’

(1 Sam. 1:14)

TO BE falsely accused is always hurtful. Hannah's prayerful response to her pain was smeared as Eli called her a mumbling drunk – and suggested that she was often the worse for wear (v.14). As we saw yesterday, the bad news for Samuel was that he was raised in a home that crackled with tension. The good news was that his mother exercised a huge amount of patience and self-control.

I'm not sure that I would have done as well as Hannah. My responses to Eli might have been quite different from hers:

‘Your sons are a couple of bullying crooks – who do they take after, Daddy?’

‘You're the head man around here – apparently you're accustomed to seeing so-called worshippers who are out of their heads. That's your problem – not mine.’

Of course one could forgo all of the above and simply grab the feckless priest by the ears before leaving in a huff. Hannah resorted to none of these approaches and didn't storm out of the shrine, never to return, bitter and resentful. Instead, she was a model of patience, respect and graciousness (Prov. 15:1). A tricky moment that could have escalated into an ugly fight was diffused by her good character.

We will all be misunderstood; it's part of life and we can't prevent it. But we can control our responses in those testing moments. Have you been trading barbed comments with someone, freezing them out with an arctic silence that is long overdue for a thaw? Think again before you strike out – or storm out.

Prayer: Father, misunderstanding usually flares without warning. Protect my heart – and my lips – in those moments of pressure. Amen.

I SPEND a large part of my life speaking at Christian conferences and weekend retreats. Going home after a spiritual celebration can be a depressing experience. The blessing of God seems to drain away as I ponder the piles of paper waiting back at the office.

For Hannah, the annual visit to Shiloh was over: it was time for the family to return home, back to domesticity – and the probability of renewed conflict with the turbo-tongued Peninnah.

But the blessing of God was going home with Hannah. As normal life resumed, behind the scenes God was at work. Samuel was conceived through the normal sexual relationship between Elkanah and Hannah. No angel appeared, no voice from heaven spoke. Simply, a man and a woman made love. And as Elkanah ‘knew’ his wife, the Lord ‘remembered’ her. Of course, God had never forgotten Hannah – but this word is used to describe His response to her cries. The child of promise was conceived within her, not a virgin birth but a miracle baby nonetheless.

God often works His miracles quietly. Gently He breaks into our days with provision and peace, protection and grace – particularly when we ask Him to. His voice is sometimes so small and still, His intervention so subtle, that we forget that today’s blessings are the answers to yesterday’s prayers and we forget to be thankful. But Hannah knew that her pregnancy was no coincidence and chose a name that celebrated the Answering God. The child was named ‘Samuel’, meaning ‘Name of God’ or ‘A godly name’.

Prayer: Lord, give me faith when I can’t see Your hand at work, and discernment to see it working more. Amen.

God lives at your house

BIG PICTURE:
1 Samuel 1:19–20
Acts 7:44–49

FOCUS:

‘Early the next morning they arose and worshipped before the LORD and then went back to their home ... Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and the LORD remembered her.’
 (1 Sam. 1:19)

God often works

His miracles

quietly

Costly worship

BIG PICTURE:
1 Samuel 1:21–28
Mark 14:32–36

FOCUS:

‘So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he shall be given over to the LORD.’

(1 Sam. 1:28)

LOVE is extravagant. It goes the extra mile, buys flowers when there’s no event to ‘justify’ the purchase and jumps through creative hoops to express itself. Hannah gave her child up for divine adoption, not because God required it but as a free will, over-the-top offering that was truly breathtaking.

After weaning young Samuel, she could have been tempted to wait until the annual sacrifice came around again, particularly as Elkanah had gone ahead. She faced a journey alone with a small child. This decision would have bought her a few more precious months with her son. She could have cited the moral decline at Shiloh as a reason to delay – why should she entrust her child to a man who thought that the fervency of a praying woman was fuelled by alcohol abuse? Instead, she did what she had promised.

And her vow was a response to the love and provision of God. She gave Samuel away, not to earn God’s favour but because she realised that the favour of God was already upon her and her boy. That’s the difference between the true believer and the religious legalist. The believer, moved by grace, offers their life in response to that amazing love. The legalist, convinced of their ability to ‘buy favour’ with God, tries to score points. One is performance-based acceptance (‘I’ll be committed so that God will love me’) and the other, acceptance-based performance (‘God loves me so much, therefore I want to please Him’).

Let love move you to extravagance today. That’s true worship.

Prayer: I offer myself freely, gladly and gratefully to You, loving God. Help me obey as a delight and not just as duty. Amen.

I HAVE met some staunchly ‘committed’ Christians who were zealous over every detail but who made discipleship look profoundly unattractive. While I admired their zeal, I don’t want to be like them or to sit next to them in heaven ...

As Hannah brought young Samuel to Shiloh, the cost to her as a mother was huge. She offered a carefully prepared sacrifice – new beginnings were always marked by such offerings. A young bull was sacrificed (a very expensive offering), together with wine and flour (v.24); items like these were used because they had been acquired by the sweat of the worshipper’s brow. She testified and then burst into a joyful song that celebrated the unique, powerful, holy God who had ‘turned things around’ for her. She offered the Lord total, unreserved obedience. But Hannah’s giving was not begrudging and negative – hers was a joyful, exuberant celebration.

So the farewell scene was no sad goodbye – it was more like a party than a parting. Hannah rejoiced and talked of her ‘horn being lifted high’. The concept of ‘a horn being exalted’ is frequently used throughout Scripture (Psa. 89:17,24; 92:10; 112:9; Lam. 2:17; Dan. 7:8; Luke 1:69). It has been suggested that this is a picture of an animal which holds his head (and thus its horns) high, with pride. Hannah’s reference to mocking her enemies (v.1) describes the practice of sticking out the tongue and crying ‘Ha!’ to your opponents.

Celebrate when you obey, give with hilarity and, dare I say it – have some fun.

Prayer: Let me be glad in my moments of greatest sacrifice. Teach me about hilarious sacrifice. Amen.

Smiling during the offering

BIG PICTURE:
1 Samuel 1:21–2:11
2 Corinthians 9:1–7

FOCUS:

‘Hannah ... said: “My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance.”’
 (1 Sam. 2:1)

Celebrate when
 you obey

In sharp contrast

BIG PICTURE:
1 Samuel 2:12–17
Matthew 6:2–4

FOCUS:
‘Eli’s sons were wicked men; they had no regard for the LORD.’
(1 Sam. 2:12)

ONE evening I watched as a well-known and widely discredited television evangelist grinned, ranted, whispered and pleaded his way through what amounted to a 60-minute sales pitch for cash. The banner caption that ran across the screen aided the coercion: ‘Want a new car? A new home? A new job?’ I wanted to turn off the television – and did.

Greed and manipulation among leaders is no modern invention; consider the goings-on at Shiloh. As we have seen, the culprits, Hophni and Phinehas, were sons of the now elderly Eli. These two are described as ‘wicked’ (v.12). They were violent thugs (v.16).

The law required that the breast and right thigh of each animal offered be given to the priest and the rest eaten by the family bringing the offering. The fat of the animal was to be burned up and offered to God (Lev. 7:28–36). An alternative system had been followed at Shiloh – the priest’s attendant would thrust a fork into the pot and whatever stuck to it was kept by the priest – potluck indeed. Apparently this didn’t satisfy the selfish brothers – they insisted that uncooked meat be given to them, so that they could pick the best even before any offering was made to God. Not only were they selfish but they also had little concern for the methods that God had specifically ordered for the sacrifices – familiarity had bred contempt.

Be sad and prayerful at the sight of hucksters using the name of God to line their own pockets. But don’t be surprised.

Prayer: Lord, save me from sliding into carelessness when I should be careful: guard my heart from the sabotage of selfishness. Amen.