



## SESSION 6

# HANNAH: TRUST-FILLED PRAYER

### ▶ **The Point**

Christ-centered living chooses prayer, not hopelessness.

### ▶ **The Passage**

1 Samuel 1:9-11,17-18,26-28; 2:1-3

### ▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

Diet and exercise. That remains the primary formula for weight loss. Of course, other medical reasons will sometimes explain why someone might be overweight. But for the vast majority of us, if we want to drop a few pounds, it comes down to diet and exercise. If the formula is that simple, why do so many of us struggle with healthy living? Beyond the other medical reasons, we can only assume that our ongoing struggle is not because we don't know what to do, but because we fail to put into practice what we know.

Prayer is like that. We know we ought to pray; we know we need to pray. But despite all the exhortations and commands, we often fail to put into practice what we know we should be doing. For Christians, prayer must become second nature to us because the alternative to choosing a consistent and ongoing prayer life is choosing, by default, to live with a sense of hopelessness. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, showed us what it looks like to come to God with our needs and trust Him to act on our behalf.

### ▶ **The Setting**

Elkanah, of the tribe of Ephraim, had two wives: Hannah and Peninnah. Hannah bore no children, but Peninnah did. Elkanah made a yearly pilgrimage to Shiloh to offer sacrifices. He gave portions of the remaining sacrificial meat to Peninnah and her children, but he gave double amounts to Hannah as expressions of his love in spite of her childlessness. Peninnah derided Hannah for being childless. Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not eat. Elkanah attempted to console and reassure Hannah.

## What does the Bible say?

**Shiloh** (1:9)—The name may mean “tranquil” or “secure.” It was a city in the territory of Ephraim. From Joshua’s time, the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant had been located there.

**My horn** (2:1)—The word “horn” was used as a metaphor for power or strength. Behind the term may have been the image of oxen’s horns as implements of their strength.

### **1 Samuel 1:9-11,17-18,26-28; 2:1-3**

**<sup>1:9</sup> On one occasion, Hannah got up after they ate and drank at Shiloh. The priest Eli was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD’s temple.**

**<sup>1:10</sup> Deeply hurt, Hannah prayed to the LORD and wept with many tears.**

**<sup>1:11</sup> Making a vow, she pleaded, “LORD of Armies, if you will take notice of your servant’s affliction, remember and not forget me, and give your servant a son, I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and his hair will never be cut.”**

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**<sup>1:17</sup> Eli responded, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant the request you’ve made of him.”**

**<sup>1:18</sup> “May your servant find favor with you,” she replied. Then Hannah went on her way; she ate and no longer looked despondent.**

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**<sup>1:26</sup> “Please, my lord,” she said, “as surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD.**

**<sup>2:1</sup> I prayed for this boy, and since the LORD gave me what I asked him for,**

**<sup>2:2</sup> I now give the boy to the LORD. For as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD.” Then he worshiped the LORD there.**

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**<sup>2:1</sup> Hannah prayed: “My heart rejoices in the LORD; my horn is lifted up by the LORD. My mouth boasts over my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.<sup>2</sup> There is no one holy like the LORD. There is no one besides you! And there is no rock like our God.**

**<sup>2:3</sup> Do not boast so proudly, or let arrogant words come out of your mouth, for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and actions are weighed by him.”**





## 1 Samuel 1:9-11 Commentary

### **Bring your needs to God.**

**[Verses 9-10]** Elkanah's annual pilgrimage to Shiloh to worship and offer sacrifices may reflect the yearly festival mentioned in Judges 21:19, or it may have been a private, family celebration. **On one occasion**, Hannah arose and walked away from the meal. In the background may have been Peninnah's taunting and Elkanah's open display of love for Hannah with generous servings at the meal. (See 1:4-6.) The implication is that Hannah had reached the limit of her endurance. She went to **the Lord's temple**. The reference could be to the tabernacle. **The priest Eli** was in charge of the temple (or tabernacle) at Shiloh. Eli was stationed by the sanctuary's **doorpost**. Hannah may have stood outside the sanctuary or may have entered. In either case, she was deeply distraught (literally, "troubled in soul"). The cause of her deep emotional distress was her inability to have a child. Every Israelite wife wanted desperately to bear children. When they did not give birth, they bore the stigma of barrenness. Their infertility was viewed as God's displeasure with them or curse on them. Added to the stigma Hannah bore was Peninnah's taunting. Doubtless, every time Hannah saw Peninnah's children, Hannah felt the acute pain of her barrenness.

**[Verse 11]** As Hannah prayed, she made **a vow**, literally "vowed a vow." This was an Old Testament way to emphasize the intensity of Hannah's plea. She addressed God as **LORD of Armies**. This name for God could refer to God's being Commander of Israel's armies, the heavenly bodies, or angels. In any case, the name recognized God's sovereignty and power. Referring to herself as God's **servant**, Hannah prayed God would **take notice of her affliction**. The Hebrew verb means "give attention to" or "look at with favor and interest." Hannah's affliction was barrenness. Hannah's urgent petition was that God **remember and not forget** her. God has no lapses of memory. The word has the idea taking action. Hannah pleaded that God not be unresponsive but act.

Hannah was specific: **"give your servant a son."** In accordance with Hannah's conditional vow, if God would give her a son, she would **give him to the LORD** for lifetime service. According to Israelite law, the firstborn child belonged to God but could be redeemed by payment of money. Hannah would waive this option and dedicate her son to God. Hannah vowed her son would serve God all his life. She would do more than the law required.

Hannah's pledge that her son's hair would **never be cut** likely reflects part of the Nazirite vow. The word "Nazirite" means "consecration," "devotion," and "separation." Nazirites did not cut their hair, drink wine or other alcoholic beverages, or touch dead bodies. They could dedicate themselves to service for a specified period or for a lifetime. Hannah vowed her son would serve God all his life.

Hannah took her desperate need for a son to God. If she could not bear a child for her husband, her peers would view her as being under God's curse because of her sin. She was confident God cared about her pain.



# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

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**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**  
*How have God's responses to your prayers shaped your understanding of Him?*

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## 1 Samuel 1:17-18,26-28

**17** *Eli responded, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant the request you've made of him."* **18** *"May your servant find favor with you," she replied. Then Hannah went on her way; she ate and no longer looked despondent. ...* **26** *"Please, my lord," she said, "as surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD.* **27** *I prayed for this boy, and since the LORD gave me what I asked him for,* **28** *I now give the boy to the LORD. For as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD." Then he worshiped the LORD there.*

**LEADER PACK:** Display Pack Item 12, "Philippians 4:6," to highlight the fact that disciples of Jesus are commanded to pray in all circumstances and to make their requests known to God—just as Hannah did.

**READ:** 1 Samuel 1:17-18,26-28 on page 110 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS:** Question #4 on page 111 of the PSG: **"When have you been blessed by an answer to prayer?"**

**SUMMARIZE:** Help group members walk through the main points from pages 110-111 of the PSG:

1. "Verses 17-18 show the immediate result of Hannah's prayer: her burden was lifted. She'd cast her cares upon the Lord, and she was able to go on her way in peace."
2. "Verses 26-28 show the longer-term result of Hannah's prayer: she gave birth to a child and named him Samuel."
3. "This was a happy ending for a woman who prayed and trusted in God. Of course, not all prayer requests end as we want them to end."

**GUIDE:** Encourage group members to read through the bullet list on page 111 of the PSG in order to learn more about how to process situations where God says "no" to our prayers.

**TRANSITION:** As we conclude with 1 Samuel 2:1-3, we'll see the appropriate response from God's people when He answers their prayers.

## 1 Samuel 1:17-18,26-28 Commentary

### **God hears your prayers and answers.**

**[Verse 17]** As Hannah prayed for a son, the priest Eli was watching. Hannah was praying silently, but her lips were forming words. Eli assumed she was drunk. Hannah respectfully protested she had not drunk wine or beer. She had been pouring out her pain to God, praying out of anguish and resentment. (See 1:12-16.)

When Eli understood Hannah's actions, he pronounced his blessing on her. **Go in peace** includes the Hebrew word *shalom*, "peace," which Israelites used in greeting and parting. It was a comprehensive term, including the senses of completeness, soundness, safety, health, prosperity, and contentment. Use of the term expressed the prayer-wish that everything would work in the person's best interests. We are not told whether Hannah revealed the substance of her prayer to Eli, but his blessing included a prayer that **the God of Israel grant her request**.

**[Verse 18]** In response to Eli's blessing and prayer, Hannah replied with a petition that she receive Eli's **favor** or grace. That is, she asked that Eli's blessing be fulfilled—that his intercession for her be effective. Buoyed by the blessing and prayer, Hannah returned to the family meal. She **no longer looked despondent**. Her prayer was yet to be answered, but she evidently was confident God had heard and would act on her behalf. On the morning after Hannah's experience, she and Elkanah returned home. They engaged in marital relations, and God remembered her—He took action on her behalf. In time, Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son.

According to Israelite custom, the mother usually named her children, although the father could do so. Hannah named her son Samuel, which means "name of God" or "heard of God." Hannah's statement, "I requested him from the Lord" (v. 20), appears to be an affirmation of God's answering her prayer rather than an explanation of the name. In any case, Samuel would be a constant reminder of Israel's God and of His power exercised on His people's behalf. When Hannah weaned Samuel, she took him to the sanctuary at Shiloh. When the annual sacrifice was complete, Elkanah and Hannah took Samuel to Eli. (See vv. 24-25.)

**[Verses 26-28]** Hannah identified herself to Eli. Likely, more than three years had passed, so the priest may not have recognized her. She addressed Eli as her **lord**, which may mean "sir" as an expression of respect in recognition of his official position. **As surely as you live** was an oath strengthening the truth of what Hannah proceeded to say. She reminded Eli she was the one who came to the sanctuary and prayed in his presence. Hannah then focused her attention on Samuel. She identified him as the **boy** for whom she had **prayed**. God had granted her request, so she was fulfilling her vow to dedicate Samuel to God. All his life, Samuel would be consecrated to God's service. The verses' language emphasizes God's gracious answer to Hannah's prayer. After Hannah presented Samuel to Eli and the Lord's service, **he worshiped the LORD there**. Hannah, Eli, Samuel, and Elkanah have been suggested as the person who worshiped. Elkanah probably led his family in worship.



## 1 Samuel 2:1-3 Commentary

### Respond to God with thankful praise.

**[Verse 1]** The biblical text gives no indication of when and where Hannah voiced her prayer or song. Hannah's joyful praise was a prayer in poetic form. As she had prayed for a son, so she **prayed** in response to God's answer. Hannah rejoiced with her whole being. In Hebrew thought, the **heart** was the center of the emotions, will, and intellect. It represented the essential person. From the core of her being and with her whole self, Hannah rejoiced **in the Lord**. Her covenant-making, covenant-keeping God was the source of her joy. This faithful **Lord** had **lifted up** her **horn**. He had given Hannah strength or power by giving her a son. Hannah emphatically credited her Lord for blessing her. Hannah used graphic imagery to express her transition from the stigma of barrenness to the exhilaration of motherhood. **My mouth boasts** presents the picture of a gaping mouth swallowing an enemy, gaining victory over an adversary. Evidently, Hannah had in mind Peninnah (and perhaps others) who had taunted her because she was childless. Hannah referred to her changed circumstance as God's **salvation**. In the Old Testament, the word Hannah used has the idea of deliverance. The root term means "to be broad, spacious," thus to be freed from confinement. It came to mean deliverance from oppression. Hannah's salvation was her deliverance from barrenness and victory over her detractors. The words **your salvation** stressed that God performed Hannah's rescue from her stigma; He was the source of her joy.

**[Verse 2]** Hannah celebrated God's uniqueness and otherness. The word **holy** refers to God's perfect moral character and to His being separate or apart from humans. God is completely "other than" anyone else; He is not remote from us but utterly different from us. Hannah stressed that He alone was the one, true God; no other **besides** Him existed. In addition, **no rock like ... God** existed. The term "rock" conveyed the image of a rocky wall. When it was used of God, it had the sense of His defense and support of His people. As the Israelites' rock, God provided solid support in times of trouble. The name Hannah used for God stressed His sovereign power. He was more than able to provide stability for His people. Of note is that in verse 1 of her song, Hannah's use of "my" and "I" reflected her personal experience with God; in verse 2 she expanded her praise and confidence with the use of **our**. She could personally depend on God, and so could her people.

**[Verse 3]** Hannah addressed wicked people or her people's enemies. She warned against boasting (speaking lofty words) and arrogance, for God knows everything. All **actions are weighed by him**. The meaning is that God balances out human actions, or that His actions are balanced or just. In either approach, the emphasis is on God's activity in human experience and His ability to work reversals. God had done so in Hannah's life, and the following verses of her song enumerate other sharp reversals God brings about.



Read the article "Excavating Shiloh, An Update" in the Fall 2017 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "At Shiloh" (Summer 2016), "Eli, His Life and Ministry" (Summer 2016), and "Samuel: A Biography" (Fall 2008) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at [lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator](http://lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator).

