November 10, 2024 (Lesson 11)

HANNAH: DEVOTED TO GOD

1. Hannah's Plight (1 Samuel 1:1-8)
2. Hannah's Prayer (1 Samuel 1:9-18)
3. Hannah's Promise Fulfilled (1 Samuel 1:24—2:3)

Central Truth: God hears and answers the earnest prayers of His people.
Focus: Examine how God answered Hannah's prayer and persist in prayer.
Evangelism Emphasis: Christians are called to intercede for the lost.
Golden Text: "Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord" (1 Samuel 1:20).

Genuine prayer involves more than simply nodding our head in consent as someone prays within our hearing. It requires much more than saying common words and patterns. Those of us who have been brought up in church and regularly attend worship services can easily find ourselves relying on prayer words and patterns which may not flow from deep within a heart of commitment and adoration.

Hannah provides us with an example of consistent sincere prayer over a period of time. She did not pray for her need and desire for a short period of time and then only occasionally mention it. Unlike Hannah, however, we can become inconsistent in prayer. Why? First, ongoing prayer is work. It takes time and effort. Second, our spiritual adversary attempts to discourage our efforts, suggesting it is an exercise in futility. Third, the length of time praying for a request with no seeming response may cause us to assume God's answer is "No."

This lesson provides us with an example of how God may choose to respond to our urgent, persistent praying. It also teaches us to not allow circumstances to hinder our confidence in God as we pray. Hannah did not allow anyone to place a roadblock in her seeking the Lord to change her circumstances in answer to her ongoing request.

The central truth of the lesson reminds us God hears and answers earnest prayers. He does not obligate Himself to flippant, halfhearted, occasional inquires concerning His provision and

intervention on our behalf. Through God's grace and mercy, He calls us into a loving, strong relationship, which will be evidenced and nurtured in our praying.

In some settings, we may repeat by memory a prayer such as the Lord's Prayer. Or, we might offer a familiar prayer of thanks before eating a meal. Each of these may serve as a genuine expression to God, provided we pray with a sincere heart.

1. HANNAH'S PLIGHT

A. Barren Womb (1 Samuel 1:1-5)

1 Now there was a certain man of Ramathaimzophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of
Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite: 2 And he had two wives; the name of the
one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. 3 And
this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of
Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there. 4 And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to
Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: 5 But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he
loved Hannah: but the Lord had shut up her womb.

Once again, Scripture records the extraordinary account of a special birth to a barren womb. Earlier examples are Sarah and Isaac, Rebekah and her twins, and Rachel's delayed conception of Joseph. In all these cases, the children played a specific part in redemptive history. Hannah's son, Samuel, may have been the most influential of all.

The narrative of this divine provision of a son begins with a brief description of the family. The father is Elkanah, a descendant of Levi's son, Kohath. This qualified Samuel to serve in a priestly role along with being a judge and prophet. This family lived in the city of Rama in the tribal territory of Ephraim. Further information indicates a polygamous marriage. God fully intended for marriage to be one man and one woman (Matt. 19:4-6). Unsurprisingly, all of the polygamous relationships

recorded in Scripture indicate strife and contention. Jacob and his two wives, Rachel and Leah, are one example (Gen. 30).

Both Elkanah and Hannah were devout individuals. Every year he took his family to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice. Each wife was given provisions to offer personal offerings. Verse 5 points to a loving relationship between Elkanah and Hannah. His love for her was not based on her conceiving children. This is significant, since barrenness was commonly viewed as resulting from the woman having committed some sin for which God was punishing her. Furthering Hannah's plight of being barren was the second wife in the family, Peninnah, who had born children to Elkanah.

Verse 3 introduces Eli, the high priest, and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Eli was old and had failed to discipline his unruly sons, even upon being warned by God (3:13). They desecrated the priestly office with immorality and improper patterns of sacrifice (2:12-17).

—*What does 1 Samuel 1:5 reveal about the sovereignty of God?*

B. Provocative Rival (1 Samuel 1:6-8)

6 And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb. 7 And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat. 8 Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?

Peninnah's true character readily became obvious. Apparently, she continued to plague Hannah concerning her barrenness in contrast to bearing children for her husband. This harassing behavior continued year after year, especially when they went to Shiloh to worship. We could see this as a form of spiritual as well as emotional abuse. It is little wonder Hannah wept and lost her appetite! The cruelty and delight Peninnah apparently received from this behavior can be seen in verse 6. She must have delighted in seeing the misery of Hannah.

Elkanah did what he could to soothe and comfort his wife. The series of four questions (v. 8) appear as genuine inquiry. But one wonders, *Could he have been so blind to what was taking place?* Regretfully, many men are somewhat hindered in their emotional understanding of women and the desire to have their own children.

The last question, "Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" (NIV), is different from the first three. Apparently, Elkanah could not grasp how devastating it was for Hannah to be barren and then undergo the constant demeaning by Peninnah.

Conflict and Combat

Conflict is inevitable, but combat is optional.—Max Lucado

2. HANNAH'S PRAYER

A. Pouring Out Grief (1 Samuel 1:9-14)

9 So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by
a post of the temple of the Lord. 10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. 11 And
she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember
me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all
the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head. 12 And it came to pass, as she continued praying before
the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth. 13 Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not
heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. 14 And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away
thy wine from thee.

After the family finished eating the sacrificial meal, Hannah went to the tabernacle to pray and pour out her anguish to the Lord. Providentially, Eli the high priest was sitting there observing the various visitors who had come to Shiloh.

Hannah's distress poured out in the form of "sore" weeping which burst out of her inner being (v. 10). It was as though a dam of tears had broken loose. The burden of years of humiliation and

persecution were at a crisis point. We can only imagine the words she silently mouthed. Her prayer of desperation was for God alone. Eli misjudged her by the lack of sound and just moving her lips. Perhaps he had seen inebriated individuals at the tabernacle attempting to pray.

Just as there are times for us to burst out in loud praise, there are situations in which we might speak in loud tones to express our needs. God hears these, but He also hears those words uttered in silence which are only between us and Him.

Hannah made a vow which might sound like bargaining with God. However, she was not offering to change her behavior if God helped her. She instead came to God as a pious woman in need of help. This has some similarities to Abraham's asking God to save Sodom and Gomorrah on the basis of the righteousness of ten people (Gen. 18). There is also the setting when Hezekiah was told he was going to die soon. Turning his face to the wall, Hezekiah reminded God of all the good he had done and how he had followed the truth (Isa. 38:3).

In the Old Testament, both women and men could make vows, but women were subject to specific stipulations. Deuteronomy 30 provides those guidelines. A young unmarried woman's vow was subject to her father's decision. If he disapproved, she was not obligated to fulfill it. In the situation of a married woman, like Hannah, her vow was subject to her husband's decision to allow or disallow.

Hannah's vow had far-reaching consequences. If God granted her prayer to have a male child who would be a Nazarite his entire life and be given to the Lord, how would Elkanah respond? This would be the firstborn male from his favored wife! For Hannah, no sacrifice appeared too great to change her barrenness. Would her husband be agreeable?

As for Eli the priest, his spiritually clouded insight misread Hannah. Before him wasn't a woman who had drunk too much wine. Rather, she was in deep intercession. His question appeared callous:

"How long will you be drunk?" Then he directed her to "Put your wine away from you" (1 Sam. 1:14 NKJV).

One can only imagine the deep hurt Hannah might have felt at Eli's words! The man fulfilling the highest spiritual position in Israel evidenced the spiritual blindness which was engulfing the nation.

—*How should parents today pray as Hannah prayed?*

B. Receiving the Priest's Blessing (1 Samuel 1:15-18)

15 And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. 16 Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. 17 Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. 18 And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.

Hannah responded respectfully to set the record straight. She pointed to being a woman of a sorrowful spirit. She was in deep anguish. She had "not been drinking beer or wine" (v. 15 NIV).

A gleam of spiritual insight enabled Eli to recognize the error of his previous assumption and words spoken. Now he wished for Hannah to "go in peace" and that God would grant her wish (v. 17). This was not a prophetic word. Rather, it was more of a comfort which Hannah needed. As she left the tabernacle, her face no longer showed the agony of grief. Upon returning to the family gathering, she ate something (v. 18). What a change from her earlier refusing to eat!

It's not likely this was the first time Hannah had shared her grief while praying for God's deliverance from barrenness and being the object of Peninnah's ridicule. Years of this turmoil had plagued her. Now the high priest blessed her to be at peace and to receive the petition for which she had prayed. His words were restful to a troubled soul. She accepted a change in her future based on these words of blessing.

What can be learned from this account? We are separated by some three millenniums of time, yet some things have not changed. Consider three simple sentences: (1) "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8 NLT). (2) We humans are the same in terms of the challenges we face and need for God's intervention. (3) God still chooses how and when He will respond to our prayers. Maybe the challenge for us continues to be one of a willingness to seek God with the same intensity as Hannah did.

Little Things

A woman asked Pastor G. Campbell Morgan, "Do you think we ought to pray about even the little things in life?" Morgan replied, "Madam, can you think of anything in your life that is big to God?"

3. HANNAH'S PROMISE FULFILLED

A. Samuel's Birth and Dedication (1 Samuel 1:19-28)

24 And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh: and the child was young. 25 And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. 26 And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord. 27 For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: 28 Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there.

In preparation for the journey home to Ramah, Elkanah and his family rose early; however, they did not leave until once again offering their worship. After intimate sexual relations occurred between Hannah and her husband, she finally conceived a child. The Lord had not forgotten her as a person nor her vow. Hannah had specifically prayed for a son. At his birth she named him *Samuel*, which means "God hears" or "I asked of the Lord."

Previously in the lesson the specific requirements for a woman fulfilling her vow were discussed. The point in time when Hannah shared her vow is not recorded. Events which follow Samuel's birth indicate Elkanah's approval of his wife's vow and willingness for Samuel to be given to the Lord. This meant removal from their home when the boy was still very young.

The timing of giving Samuel to the house of the Lord was a matter of Hannah's choice. God did not provide directions, nor did Elkanah. Hannah's deciding to remain at home and not attend the annual sacrifice was not a matter of selfishness. She specifically stated once the child was weaned, he would be given to the Lord forever (v. 22). Children were breast-fed until they were two or three years old and, in some cases, even longer. The weaning of a child was a time to celebrate. Having reached this stage of life meant a child had not become a victim of infant mortality.

After Hannah weaned Samuel, she attended the feast at Shiloh, bringing an offering of dedication along with the normal offerings of the family. As Hannah presented Samuel and the sacrificial offering, she identified herself. Her testimony was brief and concise. The Lord had graciously answered her prayer, and now Samuel was given to the Lord for the rest of his life.

Once again, the writer included the fact of the family worshiping. That was the main reason for their going to Shiloh. The parents dedicating Samuel to the Lord continued what had been initiated when Hannah had so fervently prayed for a son.

There is a principle here which all parents should grasp: "Children are a gift from the Lord" (Ps. 127:3 NLT) regardless of the circumstances of the conception and should be given back to God for His purposes.

Ministry at Home

You are as much serving God in looking after your own children, training them up in God's fear; minding the house, and making your household a church for God as you would be if you had been called to lead an army to battle for the Lord of hosts.—Charles H. Spurgeon

B. Hannah's Song (1 Samuel 2:1-3)

1 And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. 2 There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. 3 Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

Hannah's song of rejoicing was echoed by Mary's song recorded in Luke 1:46-55. Both women declared God's amazing work in their lives. Hannah's prayer began with an overflowing of rejoicing for what God had done. He stood as her strength ("mine horn," 1 Sam. 2:1). She experienced rescue from her "enemies" (namely Peninnah and her barrenness), which was the work of the Lord. Though previously distraught, she could smile at the past.

In verse 2, Hannah stated the Lord had been her foundation. The reference to God being a "rock" can also be found in 2 Samuel 22:2, 32; Psalms 18:2; 61:2. No one other than God can provide the support and encouragement needed to carry a person through the darkest storms of life. Along with the Lord's strength, Hannah recognized God's holiness.

Verse 3 refers back to the previous circumstances of ridicule. God knew all the words of arrogance and hurt spoken by Peninnah, but now her mouth was stopped. She would be judged for her actions.

Consider all the emotions and retaliations Hannah could have included in her prayer of thanksgiving, but there were no statements of hoping for God's direct judgment in the here-and-now. There were no taunts of how special God must see her as evidenced by the birth of a son.

There was no room for recrimination, which would have robbed Hannah of the current joy. Instead, she rejoiced in the Lord God, who had rescued her and who stood above all others.

—*List four truths Hannah declared about the Lord in her song (vv. 2-3).*

PRAYER ANSWERED; PROMISE KEPT

Hannah was a godly woman completely devoted to God, even though surrounded by dismal circumstances. She was a barren wife in a plural marriage. She experienced love from her husband, Elkanah, but abuse by the other wife, who had birthed children. Her grief became so great that, in desperation, she offered to give her firstborn son to the Lord forever if He would bless her with a child.

This woman did not let an accusation of being drunk discourage her pursuit of God's favor. When God granted her a son, she fulfilled her vow, taking her small son to live with Eli the priest. She did not attempt to escape her vow based on the spiritual inadequacy of Eli and his immoral sons.

Daily Devotions

M. Samson's Cry for Vengeance (Judges 16:23-31)
T. God Hears Our Prayers (Psalm 116:1-5)
W. Daniel Intercedes for His People (Daniel 9:17-19)
T. Persistence in Prayer Illustrated (Luke 18:1-8)
F. Grateful Prayer Produces Peace (Philippians 4:4-9)
S. Prayer Is Powerful (James 5:13-18)