

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

SAY: “In our last session, we looked at John and his single-minded focus. Today we look at Hannah and her trust-filled prayer.” Invite members to turn to **page 3** in the **Personal Study Guide (PSG)** and review session titles.

DISCUSS: Draw attention to the picture (**PSG, p. 136**) as you introduce **Question #1: What’s something you know you should be doing but haven’t started yet?**

OPTION: IN ADVANCE, write on the board: “I’m Thankful For . . .” As group members arrive, provide sticky notes and markers. Lead group members to write individual things for which they are thankful. Invite participants to attach their notes to the wall around the board. You will refer to this at the end of the session.

SESSION 6

HANNAH: TRUST-FILLED PRAYER



The Point

Christ-centered living chooses prayer, not hopelessness.

The Bible Meets Life

During the Thanksgiving season, our thoughts rightfully turn to the things for which we can thank God. But what about those areas of life where thanksgiving is hard?

Hannah was a woman who did not resign herself to the hardship she faced. She was despondent, but she sought God’s help and trusted Him with the answer. Thanksgiving and praise can flow from our trust that, regardless of what we face, God is with us and is working on our behalf.

The Passages

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

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.

1 Samuel 1:9-11

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.

Bring your needs to God.

1 ► **Verse 9.** Elkanah's annual pilgrimage to Shiloh to worship and offer sacrifices may reflect the yearly festival mentioned in Judges 21:19 or a private, family celebration. In the background likely was Peninnah's taunting and Elkanah's open display of love for Hannah by giving her "worthy" portions at the meal (see 1 Samuel 1:4-6). Hannah apparently had reached the limit of her endurance, since the inspired writer noted that "she wept, and did not eat" (v. 7). On one occasion, therefore, **Hannah rose up after they had eaten ..., and after they had drunk** and went to **the temple of the Lord**. Because the Hebrew word can mean "palace," the reference could be to the tabernacle, not because of its splendor but because it signified God's presence.

Eli the priest was in charge of the temple (or tabernacle) at Shiloh. As noted in verse 3, "the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas," served as priests, and Eli **sat upon a seat by a post of the temple**. The *temple* or the tabernacle, was composed of an outer chamber (the holy place) and an inner chamber (the most holy place or the holy of holies). Priests offered sacrifices in the holy place. The ark of the covenant was in the most holy place; only the high priest could enter that area. He did so once a year on the Day of Atonement. Eli likely sat outside the entrance to the holy place. ◀

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life (PSG, p. 137)**. Highlight the author's illustration of the necessity of diet and exercise for weight loss. Remark that our struggle is not because we don't know what to do, but because we fail to practice what we know.

Reinforce the importance of believers' being a people of prayer by reading **The Point** on page 140 (**PSG, p. 137**): **Christ-centered living chooses prayer, not hopelessness.**

PRAY: Ask the Lord to help group members grow in this important area of prayer. Thank Him for the example of Hannah's trust-filled prayer.

STUDY THE BIBLE 1 Samuel 1:9-11



15 minutes

GUIDE: Set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 140.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 1:9-11.

LEADER PACK: Direct the group's attention to **Item 8: People & Places** to give context for Shiloh.

PEOPLE & PLACES



GUIDE: Use **Bible Commentary 1** on page 141 and **DIGGING DEEPER (PSG, p. 138)** to describe the significance of Shiloh for the people of Israel.

SUMMARIZE: In the first few verses of 1 Samuel, we are introduced to Elkanah and his two wives, Peninnah and Hannah (**PSG, pp. 138-139**):

Since the Israelites considered motherhood a mark of God's blessing, all was well for Peninnah because she had children (1 Sam. 1:2).

(Continued on next page.)

Verse 10. Hannah was **in bitterness of soul**—deeply distraught. She **prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore**. The cause of her deep 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, since infertility was viewed as God's displeasure. 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 vowed a vow**. In the Old Testament, vows were to be fulfilled (Deut. 23:21-23). One type of vow to God has been called bargaining: If God granted the petitioner's request, the person would do something for God. Hannah made this kind of vow.

Hannah addressed God as **LORD of hosts**. 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 **handmaid**, Hannah prayed that God would **look on her affliction**. The Hebrew verb means "give attention to," "look at with favor and interest." Hannah's *affliction* (distress, frustration), of course, was her inability to bear a child.

Hannah urgently petitioned God to **remember ... and not forget** her. For God to *remember* did not imply He should call to mind something He forgot. God has no lapses of memory. Rather, she was calling God to take action. In Exodus 2, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. In their distress they cried out to God for help; "and God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Ex. 2:24). God had not forgotten His covenant; in His perfect timing, He acted on His people's behalf. Hannah prayed God would not be unresponsive but would act.

Hannah was specific in her prayer: **give unto thine handmaid a man child**—a son. Her plea is a reminder that because every life is a gift from God, we are not to take our lives for granted, and we are to value others' lives. Hannah desperately wanted a son. In her culture, sons were especially treasured because through them their fathers' lines were extended. Every Israelite wife's priority was to give birth to a son—and multiple sons if possible as added blessings.

In accordance with Hannah's conditional vow, if God would give her a son, she would **give him unto 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.

If Elkanah was the same man listed among the Levites in 1 Chronicles 6:16-26, then of course his son by Hannah would also be a Levite. Levites were priestly helpers in the tabernacle (and later in the temple), serving between the ages of 25-50 (Num. 8:24-25). But Hannah vowed her son would serve God **all the days of his life**. She would do more than the law required.

Hannah's pledge that **no razor shall come upon his head** likely reflects part of the Nazarite vow. The word *Nazarite* means "consecration," "devotion," and "separation." Nazarites 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. (See Num. 6:2-21.)

1 Samuel 1:17-18,26-28

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.

.....
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.

God hears your prayers and answers.

2 ▶ **Verse 17.** As Hannah continued to pray silently, the priest Eli saw her lips moving. Assuming she was drunk, Eli reprimanded her and instructed her to stop drinking wine. Hannah respectfully protested she had "drunk neither wine nor strong drink," but had "poured out [her] soul before the

Hannah was childless, and just as children were seen as a mark of God's blessing, childlessness was viewed as evidence that God was displeased. This was the great disappointment and sadness that Hannah lived with day by day.

DISCUSS: Question #2 (PSG, p. 139): What are some ways people deal with deep disappointment or unresolved pain?

SUMMARIZE: The Lord has another remedy: pray. This is precisely what Hannah did, and we must do likewise. Don't bury those sources of pain, disappointment, and anxiety. Actively and consistently bring those needs to God (**PSG, pp. 139-140**):

- 1. Bringing our needs to God reminds us of who we are.**
- 2. Bringing our needs to God reminds us of who He is.**

Hannah could have buried her disappointment deep within herself, but instead, she prayed. She made her request known to God and trusted Him to answer.

DISCUSS: Question #3
(PSG, p. 140): What have you been taught about the nature and purpose of prayer?

(Alternate: What do we learn about Hannah from her prayer?)

TRANSITION: “In the next verses, we’ll see Hannah begin her earnest prayer.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Samuel 1:17-18,
26-28



10 minutes

READ: Ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 1:17-18,26-28.

GUIDE: Using **Bible Commentary 2** on page 143 and this page, explain Eli’s confusion about Hannah and the blessing of peace he eventually gave.

LORD.” She was not wicked; she had been praying out of anguish and resentment. (1 Sam. 12-16).

Once the priest understood, he pronounced his blessing on her: **go in peace**. The phrase includes the Hebrew word *shalom*, which Israelites used in greeting and parting. It was a comprehensive term that could mean completeness, soundness, safety, health, prosperity, and contentment. Using the term was a way to express to someone the prayer-wish that everything 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 thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him**. Significantly, the word *God*—a translation of *Elohim*—stressed His sovereign power. Eli prayed that God would exercise His power on Hannah’s behalf. ◀

Verse 18. In response to Eli’s blessing and prayer that God would grant her request, Hannah asked that she might receive the priest’s **grace**. That is, she asked that God would respond to his intercession for her. Buoyed by Eli’s blessing and prayer, Hannah **went her way, and did eat**. Her action seems to support the view that she had left during the meal to go to the tabernacle. When she rejoined the family, she **was no more sad**. Her prayer was yet to be answered, but she evidently was confident God had heard and would act on her behalf.

The next morning, she and Elkanah returned to Ramah, their home. “Elkanah knew Hannah his wife”—Elkanah and Hannah engaged in marital relations—“and the Lord remembered her”—God acted on her behalf (v. 19). In time, Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. According to Israelite custom, the mother usually named her children, although the father also could do so. Hannah “called his name Samuel” (v. 20). Hannah’s statement, “because I have asked him of the LORD” appears to be an affirmation of God’s answering her prayer rather than an explanation of the name. Nonetheless, *Samuel* would be a constant reminder of Israel’s God and of His power exercised on His people’s behalf.

Sometime after Samuel’s birth, Elkanah’s family made the annual pilgrimage to Shiloh. This time, Elkanah “went up to offer unto the *Lord* the yearly sacrifice, and his vow” (v. 21). Even though Hannah already had vowed to give her son to the Lord, the law gave her husband the right to confirm or nullify her vow (see Num. 30:10-15). Therefore, Elkanah chose to support his wife’s choice to devote their firstborn son to lifelong priestly service. Hannah, however, stayed at home

to care for Samuel rather than making the trip to Shiloh. She told Elkanah that when Samuel was weaned, at around two or three years old, she would go to the sanctuary at Shiloh and present him to the Lord for lifelong service.

After Hannah weaned Samuel, she took him to Shiloh, with sacrifices to be offered. “Three bullocks” were an expensive sacrifice that likely indicated Elkanah was wealthy. Such a substantial offering also expressed the parents’ abundant thanks to God. The flour and wine accompanying the sacrifice were meal and drink offerings. When the sacrifice was complete, Elkanah and Hannah took Samuel to Eli (vv. 24-25).

Verse 26. Hannah identified herself to Eli. Likely, more than three years had passed, so the priest may not have recognized or remembered her. Twice, she addressed Eli as **lord**, which may mean “sir” as an expression of respect or “master” in recognition of his official position. She reminded the priest she was the one who had come to the sanctuary and prayed in his presence. Her mention of being **the woman that stood by thee here** does not mean she was in close proximity, but she was near enough that he could see her lips moving when she was **praying unto the LORD** (see vv. 12-13).

Verses 27-28. Hannah focused attention on Samuel. He was the **child** for whom she had **prayed**. God had granted her **petition**, so she was fulfilling her vow to give Samuel to God. **As long as he liveth**, Hannah declared, Samuel would be consecrated to God’s service. The language emphasizes God’s gracious answer to Hannah’s prayer. After Hannah presented Samuel to Eli and the Lord’s service, **he worshipped the LORD there**. Who *worshipped* is not clear; scholars have suggested Hannah, Eli, Samuel, and Elkanah all as possible worshipers. Elkanah probably led his family in worship.

God hears His people’s prayers. He gives focused attention to each of us as we approach Him. He answers us. The familiar suggested answers attributed to God are “yes,” “no,” and “wait a while.” My faith is that in His infinite wisdom and perfect timing, God answers appropriately for our good and in the best interest of His redemptive purpose.

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.

SUMMARIZE: Through prayer, Hannah’s burden was lifted. She went on her way having cast her cares upon the Lord—and the Lord was faithful to answer her prayer. But not all prayer requests end as we want them to end. What do we do when we pray for the job, the healing, or the provision; and God says “no”? (PSG, pp. 141-142)

- We recognize our limited vision.
- We remember God’s love.
- We trust in God’s wisdom.

DISCUSS: Question #4 (PSG, p. 142): How have God’s responses to your prayers shaped your understanding of Him?

(Alternate: When have you been blessed by an answer to prayer?)

TRANSITION: “In the next verses we see how Hannah’s continued prayer led to praise for the Lord.”

STUDY THE BIBLE

1 Samuel 2:1-3



10 minutes

READ: Read or ask a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 2:1-3.

GUIDE: Use **Bible Commentary 3** and **KEY WORD (PSG, p. 143)** to explain the meaning behind the “horn” that Hannah referenced in her prayer.

SUMMARIZE: Hannah responded appropriately to God’s intervention on her behalf with thankful praise. We should adopt a response like Hannah’s: praising God for His grace, power, and provision. We are forgetful people; we would do well to remember we always have a reason to give thanks (**PSG, pp. 143-144**):

- Remember what we deserve.
- Remember what we have.
- Remember what was paid.

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.

KEY WORD:

mine 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.

Respond to God with thankful praise.

3 ▶ **Verse 1.** The biblical text gives no indication of when and where Hannah voiced her prayer or song. One suggestion is that she chanted it while Elkanah led in worship. It could have been her spontaneous, joyful response to God’s gift of Samuel, a hymn available at Shiloh, or other materials current in her time. Hannah’s joyful praise was a prayer in poetic form. As she had petitioned God in disgrace and grief for a son, so now she **prayed** in unrestrained joy 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. From the core of her being and with her whole self, Hannah **rejoiceth in the Lord**. Her covenant-making, covenant-keeping God was the source of her joy. Her **horn** was **exalted in the Lord**: God had given Hannah new strength and spirit by giving her a son. In the first two lines of her song, Hannah emphatically credited the Lord for blessing her. ◀

Hannah used graphic imagery to express her transition from the stigma of barrenness to the exhilaration of motherhood. The phrase **my mouth is enlarged** presents the picture of a gaping mouth swallowing her **enemies**, gaining victory over her adversaries. A gaping mouth also was an expression of contempt. Evidently, Hannah had in mind Peninnah (and perhaps others) who had taunted her because she was childless. Hannah referred to her changed circumstances as **thy 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 *thy salvation* stressed that God had rescued Hannah from her stigma; therefore, He was the source of her joy.

Verse 2. Hannah celebrated God's uniqueness: **There is none holy as the Lord.** 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 emphasized that no one else compared with the covenant God she worshiped and served. She stressed that He alone was the One, true God; **none beside Him** existed. In addition, **no rock like our 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. Note that in verse 1 of her song, Hannah used "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 talking **exceeding proudly** and letting **arrogancy come out of your mouth**, for God knows everything, **and by him all actions are weighed.** The meaning may be either that He balances out human actions or that His actions are balanced or just. In either approach, the emphasis is on how God acts in human experience and is able to reverse our circumstances'. He had done so in Hannah's life, and the verses of her song that follow describe other sharp reversals God brings about.

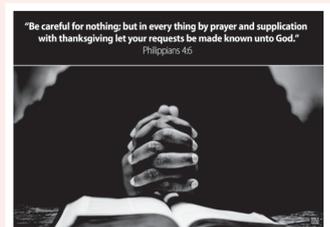
Our prayers have multiple elements. They include petition, confession, repentance, and acknowledgment of God's character traits as revealed in Jesus and in the Scriptures. Emphatic expressions in our prayers should be praise and gratitude for His presence and activity on our behalf. We give substance to our silent or vocalized praise and thanks by the quality of our living as we choose prayer over hopelessness.

DISCUSS: Question #5

(PSG, p. 144): **What are some practical ways to cultivate a lifestyle of gratitude?**

(Alternate: How does thankfulness benefit us as individuals? As a community?)

LEADER PACK: Direct the group's attention to **Item 12: Philippians 4:6** to highlight the importance of prayer. Invite a group member to read the verse aloud. Direct group members to retrieve the notes they attached to the wall earlier. Encourage them to use their notes to thank God at Thanksgiving.



DO: Invite volunteers to share their responses to the activity on **PSG page 144: "Giving Thanks through Prayer."**

LIVE IT OUT



5 minutes

GUIDE: Emphasize **The Point: Christ-centered living chooses prayer, not hopelessness.**

REVIEW: Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 145;** see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

WRAP IT UP

GUIDE: Emphasize that we always have hope because we have a God who hears our prayers.

PRAY: "Father, thank You for hearing our prayers. Make us a people of prayer."

NOTE: Remind group members that **PSG pages 6-9** are there to journal one another's prayer requests

LIVE IT OUT

How will you make prayer a priority in the days to come? Consider the following applications:

- ▶ **Offer thanks.** What are three things for which you have not thanked God? Pause right now, and pray a prayer of thanksgiving for those things.
- ▶ **Memorize.** Memorize Philippians 4:6-7 as a reminder to take your needs to God and trust His answer.
- ▶ **Journal.** Begin a gratitude journal. Spend a few moments each day writing specific prayers of gratitude. Watch how your heart begins to change.

The story of Hannah reminds us that we will face trouble and disappointment. But in the midst of that disappointment, there is an opportunity for trust-filled prayer. Praying with trust leads to gratitude to a God who provides not always what we want, but always what we need.

BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR



Silver plate representing a scene from Israel's history; shown, Samuel anointing David.

The story of Samuel starts with his parents' example of faithfulness and prayer. Samuel's father, Elkanah, was a faithful worshiper of God. He fulfilled his obligations to God as is evidenced in his pattern of faithful sacrifices before the Lord. Samuel's mother, Hannah, was also godly.

Hannah's prayer to God included two vows. First, she vowed that should God give her a son, she would give him to the Lord all his life. The second vow was that "there shall no razor come upon his head" (v. 11), the Nazarite vow.

The Hebrew word for *Nazarite* denotes the idea of separation. The significance of the vow was that the Nazarite was separated or dedicated to God. A Nazarite made a commitment of separation from the ordinary life. The Nazarite led a life of consecrated service and obedience to God. Hannah's vow that he would be a Nazarite from birth points to her intention to dedicate him to God for all his life.

While Samuel was still a young man, God began to speak to Israel through him (3:19–4:1). The statement, "the LORD was with him," indicates God blessed Samuel's life and his work and ministry as a prophet. God used Samuel because of his faithfulness and obedience. The Lord's faithfully used Samuel and Samuel was faithful to God (1 Sam. 3:19). Because he faithfully delivered God's words, "All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord" (v. 20).

The excerpt above is from the article "Samuel: A Biography" (Fall 2008), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

You can call out to God in prayer with your deepest needs and He hears. One of your deepest needs is to receive forgiveness of your sins.

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, "Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All," on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.

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Free additional ideas for your group are available at

BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra