

Sam I Am
Praying Like Hannah
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TALK IT OVER

Key Scripture:

1 Samuel 1:1-8 (NLT)

1 There was a man named Elkanah who lived in Ramah in the region of Zuph in the hill country of Ephraim. He was the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, of Ephraim. 2 Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not. 3 Each year Elkanah would travel to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of Heaven's Armies at the Tabernacle. The priests of the Lord at that time were the two sons of Eli—Hophni and Phinehas. 4 On the days Elkanah presented his sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to Peninnah and each of her children. 5 And though he loved Hannah, he would give her only one choice portion because the Lord had given her no children. 6 So Peninnah would taunt Hannah and make fun of her because the Lord had kept her from having children. 7 Year after year it was the same—Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the Tabernacle. Each time, Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat. 8 "Why are you crying, Hannah?" Elkanah would ask. "Why aren't you eating? Why be downhearted just because you have no children? You have me—isn't that better than having ten sons?"

1 Samuel 1:9-11 (NLT)

9 Once after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance of the Tabernacle. 10 Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. 11 And she made this vow: "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the Lord, his hair will never be cut."

1 Samuel 1:12-18 (NLT)

12 As she was praying to the Lord, Eli watched her. 13 Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking. 14 "Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!" 15 "Oh no, sir!" she replied. "I haven't been drinking wine or anything stronger. But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the Lord. 16 Don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow." 17 "In that case," Eli said, "go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him." 18 "Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad.

Start **talking**. Find a conversation starter for your group.

- Have you ever been made fun of for something you can't help? For example, your name, a physical feature, your level of income, etc. How did you react to it?

Start **thinking**. Ask a question to get your group thinking.

- **Read 1 Samuel 1:1-8.** Why do you think Peninnah was so cruel to Hannah? Did Elkanah help or hurt the situation?
- **Read 1 Samuel 1:9-11.** How did Hannah handle her pain? How do you normally handle pain in your life?
- Why do you think Hannah dedicated her son to the Lord before he was born?
- **Read 1 Samuel 1:12-18.** After Hannah's prayer, her mood changed but her circumstances remained the same. Discuss this.

Start **sharing**. Choose a question to create openness.

- Hannah was in deep anguish because of her barrenness. Is there anything in your life that has caused anguish, confusion or discouragement? What role has your relationship with God played in helping to solve the problem? Hannah's barrenness was engineered by God, yet Hannah cried out to God for the solution. What implications does that have for your life?
- It seems counterintuitive for Hannah to want a son so badly that she was willing to give him back to God after a brief time. Can you imagine wanting something so desperately that you would be willing to only enjoy it for a short period before letting it go? Why would you be willing or unwilling to make that sacrifice?
- When confronted with deep pain, do you turn toward God or away from him? Why?
- Just like the sin of polygamy in the story of Hannah, many of our other Bible heroes committed sins like adultery and murder. How might each of us use the sins we've overcome and those with which we're currently struggling in service to the Kingdom?

Start **doing**. Commit to a step and live it out this week.

- Commit this week to praying like Hannah, humbly and boldly giving everything over to God.

Start **praying**. Be bold and pray with power.

- Father, thank you for loving us so much that you allow the circumstances of our lives to draw us closer to you. Please help us to continue to be transformed as we give everything over to you, giving thanks and faithfully trusting that you will hear us and provide. -Amen

Start **digging**. For further study.

- Read the 2nd page and discuss it.

Question: "Who was Hannah in the Bible?"

Answer: Hannah was one of two wives of a man named Elkanah who lived "in the hill country of Ephraim" near Shiloh. The other wife of Elkanah, Peninnah, had children, but Hannah had no child. Because of this, Hannah was very grieved. She desperately desired a child but could not conceive. To make matters worse, Peninnah taunted Hannah concerning her barrenness. Although Elkanah loved Hannah and was very kind to her (1 Samuel 1:5, 8), Peninnah's unkindness on top of her natural grief was too much for Hannah to bear. Hannah cried out to God about her situation. She promised the Lord that if He would give her a son, she would dedicate him to God as a Nazirite (a man set apart to serve God; see Numbers 6:1-8).

While Hannah was earnestly and silently praying, Eli (the priest at the tabernacle) saw her and mistook her distress for drunkenness. He made a comment to encourage her to give up drinking, and she corrected his mistake. "I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief," she told him (1 Samuel 1:16). Hannah then explains her predicament, and Eli says, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him" (1 Samuel 1:17). After that, Hannah felt better; she had received God's promise.

The Lord answered Hannah's prayer. She bore a son and named him Samuel, whose name means "Asked of God." When the child was old enough, she kept her promise to the Lord, taking him to Eli and giving him to the Lord to serve in the tabernacle. There, Eli worshiped God along with Hannah. And then Hannah spoke a beautiful prayer, recorded in 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

In Hannah's prayer, God is presented as the One who helps the weak. Hannah and Peninnah represent the weak and the strong in this world. The strong often mock the weak, but God hears and rescues the Hannahs of the world. Hannah's prayer addresses the arrogance of the proud, contrasting their haughty words with God's knowledge, which is vast and far beyond their understanding. "The bows of the mighty are broken," she says, "but the feeble bind on strength" (verse 4). She begins her prayer with "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in the Lord." Hannah recognized that her strength came from God and not from herself. She was not proud in her strength but rejoiced in God's ability to make a weakling strong.

Hannah's story gives us insight into God's heart. God does not despise human desire. Hannah's longing for a child was obviously placed in her heart by God Himself. Her husband tries to comfort her, saying in loving exasperation, "Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" (1 Samuel 1:8). He does not understand why she cannot be content with what she has – namely, him! But Hannah's desire for a son would not be quenched. She was mocked by Peninnah and rebuked by Eli, but heard by God. God did not chastise her for being discontent. We know that godly contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6). But that does not mean that our human desires – even those that overwhelm us with sorrow when they are unmet – are sinful in God's eyes. He understands our feelings. He knows that "a hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Proverbs 13:12). And He invites us to bring our requests to Him (Philippians 4:6).

Hannah's story also teaches us that God can use human weakness to accomplish great things. Samuel, Hannah's son, grew up to be a great man of God – the final judge and the prophet who anointed the first two kings of Israel. But why was Hannah's story necessary? Why not just start with Samuel in the tabernacle or at the start of his judgeship? Why not simply let him be born to a God-fearing couple and send an angel to tell them to dedicate their son to God? In short, why involve Hannah's grief? Because God is glorified in Hannah's story. Her weakness, her trust in God as she turned to Him, the fervency of her desire, and her faithfulness in bringing Samuel to God as promised are all evidences of God working in Hannah's life. Her tears were ordained to be part of the glorious story of what God was doing in Israel's history.

Every person experiences desires that will not be quenched and circumstances that cause grief. Many times, we simply do not understand these things. But in the life of Hannah we see that God knows our story from beginning to end, that everything has a purpose, and that trust in Him is never misplaced.