

HANNAH, FAITHFUL SUPPLICANT

Shaun jumped up with a shout, bumping and nearly spilling his drink on the man sitting in the bleachers beside him.

“I’m so sorry,” Shaun said. “That’s my son who caught that pop fly!”

“I get it!” said the other father, glancing back at Shaun and wiping his brow. “He’s a good player. Not many of them would catch that one.”

The ten-year-olds were having a good time playing ball, but Shaun was possibly having the most fun of all. As he exchanged glances with the other father, he was reminded of how much older he was than the average parent at the game. But then, there was a time he was convinced he and his wife would never have kids.

They married later in life and endured years of questions from well-meaning friends and family. Everyone was curious if they were going to have children. After the miscarriages, each question was like a knife to Shaun’s heart. Other members of their church were having baby showers and celebrating births.

Shaun and his wife kept petitioning, pleading with the Lord to bless them with a child. He remembered praying, *Father, whether this happens or not, You are in control.*

“Atta boy!” Shaun hollered out as the teams exchanged sides.

1 Can you name an unfulfilled part of your life? If so, how have you taken it to God?

2 How do you handle things in your spiritual life that feel unfair?

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.

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.

⁹ Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the LORD's house. ¹⁰ In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. ¹¹ And she made a vow, saying, "LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

¹² As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³ Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴ and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."

¹⁵ "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. ¹⁶ Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

Misunderstood Grief

In Scripture, polygamy is not presented in a positive light—surely because of situations like Hannah's at the start of 1 Samuel. Hannah is one of two wives of the same man, but Peninnah has children while Hannah does not. Hannah is grieved by her infertility,

especially in the face of mockery from her rival (see 1 Sam. 1:6–7). The whole family makes an annual pilgrimage to worship at the sanctuary of Shiloh, which becomes a painful occasion for Hannah.

The reading picks up during one of these trips, when the family is gathered to eat together. But Hannah removes herself to find a more private space for prayer. In her heart, she cries out to God in desperation (v. 10). Hannah knows that God alone can give what she lacks; God alone is powerful over the biological processes of conception (see Gen. 4:1).

Begging the Lord to remember her, she vows that her son would be dedicated to the Lord's service. Her vow goes beyond the expectations of Exodus 13:2, promising that a potential son would never cut his hair—which is an indication of a priestly office or a Nazirite vow (see Num. 6:5). Her desire for a son is not so that she might cling to him but offer him back in service to the Creator.

Hannah is misunderstood while praying. Eli, the priest acting as leader at this time, observes her lips moving wordlessly. He leaps to the conclusion that Hannah has had too much feasting and has grown drunk on wine (vv. 12–14). Hannah's response to Eli conveys her deep anguish. Her response draws a contrast between the drinks she has not consumed, beer and wine, and the offering of her soul that she has “poured out” to God (v. 15).

1 When have you been forced to endure the teasing or scorn of someone else?

2 Do you think that Hannah's vow spurred God to act, or something else?

3 What might Eli's misunderstanding expose about his sensitivity and powers of perception?

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.

¹⁹ And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her. ²⁰ Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD.

²⁵ And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.

¹⁷ Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

¹⁸ She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

¹⁹ Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. ²⁰ So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, “Because I asked the LORD for him.”

²⁵ When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli,

Rekindled Hope

Many of us experience times of powerlessness, when heartfelt prayers are all we have. Hannah’s prayers and vow are met with a blessing. Hannah never actually explains the nature of her request before God, but words of blessing are important—particularly when spoken by Israel’s spiritual leader. Eli anticipates God’s action: “may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked” (v. 17).

The writer of the biblical text seems to enjoy the irony: Eli blesses the coming of a child whom God will choose to replace Eli. In the following chapters, the text describes his terrible leadership and inability to hear from God (see 1 Sam. 3:1, 11–14). But here he is just a priest who missed the point and was searching for the right words to say.

Hannah knows that her situation has changed. Her posture is altered, and she feels able to eat and to carry on with her family once more (v. 18). Through Eli’s words, she recalls God’s gracious character.

To make the long journey home, the family rises early. Later when they are home, God allows Hannah to conceive (v. 19). This phrasing—God’s remembrance of a childless woman—is also used when Rachel first conceives (Gen. 30:22). Like other miraculous births in Scripture, the child is special, his role carefully prepared.

Hannah’s anguish will follow her no longer—she gives birth to a son! Names in Scripture often give clues about a person’s role. Hannah, the boy’s long-suffering mother, chooses a name to remind everyone of his origin: she *asked* for a son, and *God* granted her prayer. Thus the name “Samuel” sounds like the Hebrew verb for “ask” combined with a title for God. Samuel’s name is a reminder of answered prayers and petitions.

Many parents would not dream of giving up a precious child, but Hannah is faithful to the letter of her vow, returning him for the Lord’s service. Once he is no longer nursing, she brings him back to Eli (1 Sam. 2:25). Hannah’s desire for a son wasn’t just for her own sake, and God used her desires and prayers to bring leadership to His people—to bring them back to covenant faithfulness. This son of Hannah’s would go on to be a prophet, priest, and judge. He would go on to anoint two of Israel’s kings.

God’s blessing upon Hannah also went beyond her request for one child. Although she would visit Samuel each year, she would also have five more children (1 Sam. 2:19–21). God turned Hannah’s anguish into great joy.

1 What does the miraculous conception of Samuel demonstrate for readers?

2 What does Samuel’s name mean? Do you have a name with special meaning?

3 How does Hannah’s witness inspire you to greater faith?

How Does “Even Better” Sound?

It would be easy to apply the wrong lessons from the story of Hannah. Who among us has not sat in the position of waiting for prayers to be answered? But perhaps we are transfixed by the story of Hannah because we think God responded with a simple, “Yes.” We need to see that God’s answer was, “I’ll do *even better*.” Hannah’s desire for a son became the context for God’s restoration of leadership to Israel. Eventually, Hannah seems to have understood this greater story as she exalts God for a coming king, one anointed by God (1 Sam. 2:10). Even Hannah could not have predicted the New Testament chapter to this story, the coming of an eternal king.

In church ministry, I meet with people in all circumstances. Jesus Himself invites His disciples to a posture of continual prayer, never losing hope as we remember God’s faithfulness (Luke 18:1). Still, I often reflect on the mysterious workings of God. I would love to reassure everyone, “God will give whatever you want if you pray faithfully.” But I cannot say this. I see situations where God appears to be saying, “No,” or where the answer is not easy to see.

The Father in heaven enjoys giving good gifts (Luke 11:11–13). But it isn’t transactional! It’s not as if we can pray long and hard enough to get all the things we might want. Luke 11:13 even specifies that the good gift God *most* wants to give is the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, I notice that all the prayers and waiting are often able to transform us, reshaping desires of our hearts to align more fully with God’s.

Sometimes we find joy when the Lord answers our prayers the way we first imagined. Other times, we find an entirely separate joy when God is present in our longing, offering more of His comfort, His peace, and His presence. It is in that way that God is always ready to transform our anguish into joy.

1 How was God’s answer to Hannah’s prayer even better than a simple yes?

2 What are some of the good gifts that God enjoys giving?

3 Why might God say no to some of our prayers?

Patient Faith

During your prayer time this week, you are invited to try a gratitude exercise. Think back to the ways God has provided: a sought-after position, a victory over a health battle, the birth of a child. While you reflect on God's answers to prayer, pay attention to the three answers God can give.

I can give thanks for God's faithfulness and trust Him.

God answered with a "yes" when . . .

God answered with a "not yet" when . . .

God answered with an "even better" when . . .

Key Text

Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after 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 KJV

So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."

—1 Samuel 1:20 NIV

Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

Week of June 15 through June 20

Mon. Romans 1:8–12—A Praying Friend.

Tue. 1 Corinthians 15:30–34—Choose Your Friends Wisely.

Wed. Proverbs 18:19–24—A Friend Closer than a Brother.

Thu. Ruth 1:11–18—Friends Stick Together.

Fri. John 15:9–17—Friends Love Radically.

Sat. 1 Samuel 20:16–17, 32–34, 42—Sworn Friendship.

Next Week: 1 Samuel 18:1–4; 20:16–17, 32–34, 42; 2 Samuel 1:26–27; 21:7
Our prayers can be answered in community too. Try to list the names of your closest friends in each stage of life.