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HANNAH: FAITH THAT PRAYS



When have you actually enjoyed waiting for something?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

Pray with confidence; God hears.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

A guest evangelist encouraged our congregation to share prayer needs. One by one, people poured their hearts out to the Lord, including my friend Hester. Hester struggled with infertility, and I heard her plead with God to provide a much-desired child. Women gathered around her, asking God to intervene. We had confidence God heard our prayer, and we anxiously waited for His response.

But as the years passed, Hester and her husband experienced a failed adoption and financial struggles. Nevertheless, she kept praying.

Then, at the age of 42, Hester got sick. The doctor suspected a mass on her ovaries, but she needed tests. During an ultrasound, the doctor exclaimed, "There it is!" Dazed and concerned, Hester began crying, fearing the worst. But it wasn't a mass—it was a miracle baby! Eli was born prematurely a few months later, but he is thriving today as a healthy young man. God heard the cries of my friend, just as He heard Hannah pray centuries earlier. Hester did what Hannah had modeled: both women prayed persistently and faithfully.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 Samuel 1:1-2,9-11

¹ There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ² He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

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."

The life of Hannah is a reminder that God cares about our requests and He is faithful to respond. We often approach God with a laundry list of wants and desires, but Hannah approached God with a single request: "Not forget your servant but give her a son."

Having children—especially sons—was of great importance in their culture. We see this in verse 1 with the repeated reference to one man being "son of" another. Hannah experienced disappointment in not providing an heir who would continue the lineage of "son after son." Just as children were seen as a mark of God's blessing, childlessness was viewed as evidence that God was displeased with a family. Hannah lived with this stigma day after day—which is why this appears to have been her singular focus in prayer.

We may find ourselves in a similar place of comparison and disappointment. In our struggle to be "enough" for others, we must remember we already are enough—indeed, more than enough—in God's plan and kingdom.

What do you appreciate about Hannah's prayer?

QUESTION #2

Hannah's greatest need could only be met by an intervention from God Himself. Through tears and pain, Hannah made her case before the Lord. She made a solemn vow that if God would answer her prayer, she would dedicate the child back to Him.

We can learn four things from Hannah's prayer:

- 1. She acknowledged God for who He is:** the "LORD Almighty."
- 2. She was specific in her request:** "Not forget your servant but give her a son."
- 3. She submitted to God's plan for her life.** She called herself "your servant," submissive to God's plan.
- 4. She was hopeful.** "I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life."

Sometimes our prayers are specific like Hannah's request. God may answer our prayers quickly by saying "yes," or, like Hannah, it may be years before He answers. God may even tell us "no," but all His answers are designed to teach us to depend only on Him.

1 Samuel 1:17-18,26-28

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.

²⁶ And she said to him, "Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. ²⁷ I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. ²⁸ So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

What characteristics of God help us know we can trust Him?

QUESTION #3

Hannah had poured out her heart to God weeping, but she left the temple no longer despondent. The priest Eli assured her the Lord had heard her prayer, but ultimately, Hannah's trust wasn't in Eli's assurance, but in the God who answers. She gained the peace that comes from relinquishing your desires for God's desires.

God answered Hannah's prayer by enabling her to give birth to a son. She gave him the name Samuel, which means, "heard of God," a reminder God heard Hannah's prayer. Hannah's name means "grace or favor," a fitting picture of God's favor to a barren woman. God hears our requests and offers grace to us when we don't deserve it.

Hannah stayed in touch with her son. She returned every year to the temple, bringing Samuel a gift of a new robe (1 Sam. 2:19). She never abandoned Samuel; she merely gave him back to God and trusted his life in the hands of the Creator. And God continued to answer Hannah's prayer! She later had five additional children (1 Sam. 2:21).



1 Samuel 2:1-3

¹ Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. ²"There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. ³"Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed."

Hannah responded to God's answer to her prayer with praise and thanksgiving. Her desperate prayer in chapter 1 turned to triumphant praise in chapter 2. Hannah rejoiced in God's sovereignty and power. This is a pinnacle moment of Hannah's dedication of Samuel, a declaration of fulfilling her vow and acknowledging God's provision for herself and for the future of Israel.

What are some ways we can respond to answered prayer?

QUESTION #4

Hannah praised God for:

- ▶ **His holiness.** “There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you.” God is set apart; He stands over and separate from His creation. And only God can do the things He does.
- ▶ **His infinite knowledge.** Hannah declared God’s omniscience, His ability to have unlimited knowledge about everything.

Mary prayed a similar prayer in Luke 1:46-55. As a devout Jew, Mary had surely learned the prayer of Hannah and would use it in her own circumstances. Unlike Hannah, Mary had not prayed for a child, yet she recognized, as Hannah did, that God was at work doing something great.

When Shouna discovered she was pregnant with her third child, she and her husband, Gary, were surprisingly excited. This blessing was coming later in life for them. When their son was born with Down syndrome, they only asked God one question: “What work are you doing in our family’s life?” Instead of seeing Preston as a burden to bear, they saw it as a privilege to share him with the world.

Their son is a gift from the Lord, opening the door for ministry to hundreds of families through special camps and work programs. Gary and Shouna responded to God’s bigger plan for their lives when they realized He opened a door to ministries they might not have understood without having Preston. Their response to Preston’s life is a continual life of worship and praise.

Many times we’ve seen God answer a prayer exactly the way we prayed, but most of us have also waited a long time—or are still waiting—for God to answer a deep need. For many of us, it may seem that an answer to a painful circumstance is far away. Don’t give up. Continue to pray in faith, trust Him for the outcome, and be persistent in your petition. Jesus invites us to be persistent (Luke 18:1-8)! And when He answers, be equally persistent in your praise and worship.

How have you seen God work through prayer in our group?

QUESTION #5

PRAYING IN CONFIDENCE

Number the following issues from the most important to least important problems people in our culture face. Then answer the question.

- ___ Financial needs ___ Health problems ___ Daily decisions
- ___ Relationship conflicts ___ Planning for the future ___ Job stress
- ___ Kid issues ___ Pride ___ Lust
- ___ Substance abuse ___ Other: _____

Which of these is the most urgent prayer need you have? Using Hannah's prayer as a model, write a brief prayer to the Lord, asking for His help:

"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

— PHILIPPIANS 4:7

LIVE IT OUT

Be intentional this week to bring your requests to God with persistence. Consider these ways to pray with faith and persistence:

- ▶ **Pray.** If you're not in the habit of praying, begin. Do more than just offer casual prayers; set aside time each day for an uninterrupted conversation with God with no distractions.
- ▶ **Pray with others.** Share your needs with others. "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matt. 18:19-20).
- ▶ **Pray with a journal.** Begin a prayer journal or write down your prayer requests. Record Scriptures that speak of God's character and His plans for your life. Journal about the ways you see God working in the midst of your need.



Sometimes an affirmative answer to prayer may seem unlikely. But God has given us plenty of examples in the past, and many in the present, that remind us to continue to pray with confidence.

My thoughts