SESSION 3

HANNAH: FAITH THAT PRAYS

*The Point*
Pray with confidence; God hears.

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

*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.

*The Setting*
The Book of 1 Samuel presents the historical bridge from the judges until the death of Israel’s first king, Saul. Samuel’s father was Elkanah; his mother was Hannah who was childless at that time. Hannah prayed confidently; God heard her prayer and gave her a son, Samuel. As soon as he was weaned, Hannah gave him to the Lord by delivering him to live and serve with Eli the priest.
1 Samuel 1:1-2,9-11,17-18,26-28; 2:1-3

1:1 There was a man from Ramathaim-zophim in the hill country of Ephraim. His name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. 2 He had two wives, the first named Hannah and the second Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless.

9 On one occasion, Hannah got up after they ate and drank at Shiloh. The priest Eli was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the Lord's temple. 10 Deeply hurt, Hannah prayed to the Lord and wept with many tears. 11 Making a vow, she pleaded, “Lord of Armies, if you will take notice of your servant’s affliction, remember and not forget me, and give your servant a son, I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and his hair will never be cut.”

17 Eli responded, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant the request you’ve made of him.” 18 “May your servant find favor with you,” she replied. Then Hannah went on her way; she ate and no longer looked despondent.

26 “Please, my lord,” she said, “as surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. 27 I prayed for this boy, and since the Lord gave me what I asked him for, 28 I now give the boy to the Lord. For as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.” Then he worshiped the Lord there.

2:1 Hannah prayed: My heart rejoices in the Lord; my horn is lifted up by the Lord. My mouth boasts over my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation. 2 There is no one holy like the Lord. There is no one besides you! And there is no rock like our God. 3 Do not boast so proudly, or let arrogant words come out of your mouth, for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and actions are weighed by him.
GET INTO THE STUDY

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 2, the “Living by Faith Map,” to give context for some of the places that were important in the story of Hannah.

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 29 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “When have you actually enjoyed waiting for something?” Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 30 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of prayer by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 30 of the PSG: “Pray with confidence; God hears.”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, on a poster or white board, write headings for three columns: Situation, Worry, and Faith. Ask members to give examples of situations where some people exhibit worry and others respond with faith. Write the answers beneath the appropriate heading. Lead a discussion around this question: “Since the results of faith are far better than those of worry, why do some people choose to worry rather than pray in confidence?”

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 3, the “Judges” poster to give context for where Samuel is in the line of Israel’s judges.

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to open our eyes to ways we can influence others for Him.
1 Samuel 1:1-2,9-11

1 There was a man from Ramathaim-zophim in the hill country of Ephraim. His name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. 2 He had two wives, the first named Hannah and the second Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless.

9 On one occasion, Hannah got up after they ate and drank at Shiloh. The priest Eli was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple. 10 Deeply hurt, Hannah prayed to the LORD and wept with many tears. 11 Making a vow, she pleaded, “LORD of Armies, if you will take notice of your servant’s affliction, remember and not forget me, and give your servant a son, I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and his hair will never be cut.”

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Samuel 1:1-2,9-11 on page 31 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain the background for Hannah’s plight.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 31 of the PSG: “What do you appreciate about Hannah’s prayer?”

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 32 of the PSG. We can learn four things from Hannah’s prayer in verse 11:

- **She acknowledged God for who He is:** the “LORD of Armies.”
- **She was specific in her request:** “Give your servant a son.”
- **She submitted to God’s plan for her life.** She called herself “your servant,” submissive to God’s plan.
- **She was hopeful.** “I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life.”

TRANSITION: Not only should we bring our requests to God, but the next verses show us we can trust God to answer.
1 Samuel 1:1-2,9-11 Commentary

[Verses 1-2] Samuel’s ancestry and birth are presented in the opening verses. Elkanah was Samuel's father; his ancestors lived in the territory of Ramathaim-zophim in the hill country of Ephraim. Scholars today are unsure of the exact location of this rural town. Elkanah’s wives were Hannah (“charming” or “gracious”) and Peninnah (“pearl” or “prolific”). Peninnah had children, but Hannah was childless. Verses 3-8 reveal Elkanah’s habit of worshiping at Shiloh every year and including his family. These verses also reveal the family problems caused by Peninnah’s taunting of Hannah because of her childlessness and Hannah’s responses.

[Verses 9-10] Hannah’s faith caused her to pray and bring her needs to the Lord. Although Hannah accompanied Elkanah to the Lord’s temple year after year (v. 7), the story focuses on one occasion. The phrase the Lord’s temple coupled with the word doorpost may mean the tabernacle which housed the ark of the covenant had been replaced with a building. Israelites believed the ark represented the earthly presence of God. The ark was the central focus of Israel’s worship until Solomon dedicated the temple. Part of Hannah’s worship experience was eating a fellowship meal that indicated their participation in bringing an offering to God. The words deeply hurt reveal Hannah’s worship was an emotional experience. That she did not have a son weighed heavily on her. She didn’t try to fix her problems on her own. She didn’t give up. She didn’t blame someone else. She didn’t even enlist the assistance of others. Hannah brought her deepest needs to God. Not only did Hannah pray, she wept with many tears. Her outward appearance and actions (praying and weeping) revealed the struggle in her soul that her childlessness had brought to her heart. Although we may not completely understand all these feelings, most of us have matters that weigh heavily on us. Hannah’s response—bringing her concerns to God in prayer—is appropriate for us also.

[Verse 11] Hannah did not stop with prayer, she also made a promise, a vow to God. The words she pleaded reveal the depth of her response to God and imply an ongoing activity rather than a one-time request. The title Hannah used, Lord of Armies, is sometimes translated “Lord of hosts.” Although this phrase is used many times in the Old Testament, Hannah was the first person recorded to do so. This title points to God’s power and authority to accomplish whatever He has planned to do. The depth of Hannah’s prayer is revealed in the repetition of verbs in her vow: pleaded . . . take notice . . . remember . . . not forget . . . give. While some of these verbs elaborate on previous ones, they crescendo to the final verb, give. Hannah promised that if God would give her a son, she would (1) give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and (2) never cut his hair. This second promise points toward a nazirite vow, indicating dedication to the Lord. Indeed, Hannah had brought her needs to God—and as we will see, God answered her prayer. When we pray with confidence in God, He hears our prayers and provides the right answer for us in His perfect time.
1 Samuel 1:17-18,26-28

17 Eli responded, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant the request you’ve made of him.” 18 “May your servant find favor with you,” she replied. Then Hannah went on her way; she ate and no longer looked despondent.

26 “Please, my lord,” she said, “as surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. 27 I prayed for this boy, and since the Lord gave me what I asked him for, 28 I now give the boy to the Lord. For as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.” Then he worshiped the Lord there.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Samuel 1:17-18,26-28 on page 32 of the PSG.

RECAP: 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.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 32 of the PSG: “What characteristics of God help us know we can trust Him?”

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain how Hannah dedicated her son to the Lord but remained a part of his life.

RECAP: 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).

TRANSITION: The next passage demonstrates how we should thank God for His answers to our prayers.
1 Samuel 1:17-18,26-28 Commentary

[Verse 17] In 1 Samuel 1:15-16, Hannah told Eli she was not drunk but had been pouring out her heart before the Lord. Eli accepted Hannah’s explanation and told her, “Go in peace.” This common Hebrew benediction indicated much more than an absence of (military) conflict. Shalom (translated “peace”) refers to right relationships between God and others, thus giving the person who experiences it a sense of wholeness, serenity, and life as it was meant to be lived. In addition to wishing Hannah peace, Eli also responded by saying “may the God of Israel grant the request you’ve made of him.” In English this phrase appears to be more of a wish. However, some Hebrew scholars view it as an imperative for God to fulfill Hannah’s request.

[Verse 18] Hannah humbly referred to herself as your servant. She expressed the desire to find favor with Eli. When Hannah took her needs to God, she trusted God to answer. Hannah went on her way; she ate and no longer looked despondent. Her trust in God is evident by these actions she took. Verses 19-23 describe Samuel’s conception, birth, and early life until he was approximately three years old. During these years Hannah did not go back to Shiloh but waited until she could fulfill her vow to give Samuel back to God. Bible scholars debate the meaning of Samuel’s name. Some suggest “God hears” or “God has heard.” Others suggest “asked of God” and “asked from Yahweh.” Whatever may be the exact origin, his birth was in response to God’s remembering Hannah’s request.

[Verses 26-28] Hannah recounted for Eli their last encounter. She remained very respectful of Eli, calling him my lord twice. Perhaps this explanation was necessary because Eli was getting old or perhaps it was because Eli had seen a number of women at Shiloh over the past several years. In either case, Hannah wanted to remind Eli of the circumstances of their last meeting. Hannah told Eli exactly what she had prayed for: this boy. Hannah also told Eli “the Lord gave me what I asked him for.” Before God had answered her prayer, she had faith He would do so (v. 18). Once God had answered, she was ready to keep her vow—she gave the boy to the Lord. The Bible reveals no hesitancy on Hannah’s part. Since God did for her exactly what she asked, Hannah did for God exactly what she had promised. She fulfilled her vow. Hannah explained the details of her action: “For as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord.” Hannah was generous in fulfilling her promise. She did not cheat God or try to wiggle out of her commitment. Finally, the Bible tells us he worshiped the Lord there. Although some manuscripts have she or they, most scholars believe the correct reading is he. However, a disagreement centers around knowing who he is. Some believe it refers back to Eli; others believe it refers to Samuel. In either case, worship is the appropriate response when God keeps His promises.
1 Samuel 2:1-3

1 Hannah prayed: My heart rejoices in the LORD; my horn is lifted up by the LORD. My mouth boasts over my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.

2 There is no one holy like the LORD. There is no one besides you! And there is no rock like our God. 3 Do not boast so proudly, or let arrogant words come out of your mouth, for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and actions are weighed by him.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Samuel 2:1-3 on page 33 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 33 of the PSG: “What are some ways we can respond to answered prayer?”

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 34 of the PSG. 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.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 34 of the PSG: “How have you seen God work through prayer in our group?”

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, “Praying in Confidence” on page 35 of the PSG to help them.

Number the following issues from the most important to least important problems people in our culture face: Financial needs, Health problems, Daily decisions, Relationship conflicts, Planning for the future, Job stress, Kid issues, Pride, Lust, Substance abuse, Other. Then answer the questions.

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” for this session: “Pray with confidence; God hears.”

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:** Why is praise an important part of prayer?
[Verse 1] Hannah responded in thanksgiving to God for His answer to her request for a son. She thanked God for answering her prayer and described some of God’s attributes. The opening words indicate that although this prayer is written in poetic format, it is first and foremost an act of worship. Hannah had previously responded by fulfilling her vow to give Samuel to the Lord (1:9-11). Here, Hannah responded by voicing thankfulness to Him. The first element of thankfulness Hannah expressed was praise. In saying “my heart rejoices in the Lord,” Hannah revealed the depth of her feelings. Hannah’s inner being was focused on the joy she felt, particularly joy over God’s answering her prayer. The grammatical form of the Hebrew verb translated rejoices reveals this action was not a one-time experience but rather an ongoing practice. Although this prayer contains Hannah’s last recorded words in the Old Testament, the verb reveals her rejoicing continued. Hannah’s rejoicing was not in Samuel; her rejoicing was in the Lord, the One who gave the answer.

My horn refers to a visible sign of strength or power. For Hannah, this sign was Samuel. Lifted up refers to a visible sign by the Lord of His answer to her prayer for a son. God abundantly answered that prayer by giving her not only Samuel, but other children as well. “My mouth boasts over my enemies” most likely referred to Peninnah (1:2) who is described as Hannah’s “rival” (v. 6). Hannah specified the reason for her boasting: “because I rejoice in your salvation.” In the Old Testament, the word salvation has the basic idea of rescue from an enemy or deliverance from a problem. Likely Hannah had in mind a combination of these.

[Verse 2] The three lines of verse 2 focus on God’s attributes (qualities). The first declares, “there is no one holy like the Lord.” The word holy represents a distinctiveness, a separateness of one who has a specific purpose. The second line proclaims, “there is no one besides you,” a description of the Lord Himself, a repetition of the first line with added details implied in the first line. The third line testifies, “there is no rock like our God.” This affirmation adds to the parallelism by providing an additional description of God. Rock refers to the stability of bedrock rather than to a small movable stone. Like our God reflects God’s incomparable nature.

[Verse 3] This verse focuses on commands concerning the response of those who heard this prayer. The first command is “do not boast so proudly.” The second command, “or let arrogant words come out of your mouth,” parallels the first by adding detail. Together, these two lines warn against those who would speak without having knowledge (as indicated by the third and fourth lines in this verse). The reason Hannah gave these commands is described in the third and fourth lines. For can also be translated “because.” “For the Lord is a God of knowledge” lays the foundation for the final line, “actions are weighed by him.” These two lines provide the rationale for Hannah’s commands earlier in this verse. They give further reasons for thanking God for His answer to prayer.

Read the article “The Nazirite Vow” in the Summer 2019 issue of Biblical Illustrator. Previous Biblical Illustrator articles relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.
LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 36 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week.

- **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, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among 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.

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**Wrap It Up**

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 36 of the PSG:

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.

**PRAY:** Conclude by asking God to give us the confidence we need to pray boldly. Thank Him for the ways He has been faithful to answer our prayers before.

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LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry