

Hannah: Learning to Be Someone



SABBATH—OCTOBER 9

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: 1 Samuel 1; 1 Samuel 2:1–11, 21; Job 2:12, 13; Matthew 6:19, 20; Luke 12:16–21.

MEMORY VERSE: “Then Hannah prayed. She said, ‘The Lord has filled my heart with joy. He has made me strong. I can laugh at my enemies. I’m [I am] so glad he saved me. There isn’t [is not] anyone holy like the Lord. There isn’t [is not] anyone except him. There isn’t [is not] any Rock like our God’ ” (1 Samuel 2:1, 2, NIV).

ONE OF THE BIGGEST STRUGGLES THAT PEOPLE FACE IS THE SENSE OF THEIR OWN SELF-WORTH. What are we worth in this world? What meaning can one life have when there are billions of other people in the world? We read about wars where millions of people have been killed. Every day thousands of people are born and thousands of people die. We sense powerful forces at work that we cannot control. They can run over us and destroy our dreams as quickly as a truck runs over a bug on the road. Against such powerful events, how do we find a sense of our own meaning and purpose? Do we even have any?

The Bible teaches that we do have a purpose and that our lives do have meaning. It teaches that people are created in the image (likeness) of God. We are important because we are important to God. Who cares what others think of you if the great, powerful God of the universe¹ loves you? His love, above all, is what matters.

This week we will read about the life of Hannah. She is not a famous queen or a prophetess but an ordinary woman. Through her story we will also get to know God as Someone who loves us tenderly and personally. In this world it is easy for us to think that we are not important at all. But Hannah’s story shows us a God who tells us we are important to Him.

1. universe—all of space and everything in it, including stars, planets, galaxies (solar systems), and so on.

SUNDAY—OCTOBER 10**WHAT AM I WORTH?
(1 Samuel 1:1–16)**

First Samuel 1:1–16 shows that Hannah knew her husband loved her. What do these verses also tell us about why she was upset about not having children?

Hannah's feelings are not hard to understand. In her culture,² having no male child meant having no security³ in one's old age. People also thought that not having a child was a curse from God. Both in public and within her own family, a woman without a child suffered from the negative and unfair belief that God had cursed her. This must have made Hannah feel worthless in the eyes of society and in her relationship with God. Hannah must have wondered at times what she had done to deserve this. Why was this happening to her?



In Hannah's time, not having a child was thought to be a curse from God.

To understand how women of the Old Testament felt when they were childless, read what Sarah (Genesis 16:1, 2) and Rachel (Genesis 30:1) did and said. How do they help us understand how strong the feeling of sadness must have been back then for women who could not have children?

We can understand Sarah's actions when we know the customs⁴ of her time. Her actions help us to understand her feeling of hopelessness and the pain she must have carried. After all, what woman would encourage her husband to have sex with another woman in order to have children? We can understand Hannah's feelings even better when we read about Rachel's heartfelt cry to Jacob.

Hannah poured out her heart before the Lord. She was not getting younger. Time was against her. It must have seemed that God was against her too.

Remember, also, that in Hannah's time, a woman's job (work) was having and raising children. There were no other careers. A woman could not just go out and find satisfaction in another kind of work. We have examples of female judges and female prophetesses in the Old Testament. But these examples are very few and depended on God's direct call. It was only by having children that Hannah could feel that her life had worth. For

2. culture—the beliefs, customs, arts, and so on, of a particular society, group, place, or time.

3. security—the state of being protected or safe from harm.

4. customs—actions or ways of behaving that are usual and traditional among the people in a particular group or place.

her, life without children had no real meaning.

A father lost his child to leukemia.⁵ The father told his pastor that he believed his son died because he had not kept the commandments faithfully, especially the Sabbath. He felt this was why God punished him. What is wrong with this kind of thinking? How can we protect ourselves from getting trapped in that same kind of thinking?

MONDAY—OCTOBER 11

WHO NEEDS ENEMIES WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE? (1 Samuel 1:6, 7)

Hannah thought she was under the curse of God. She felt that her life was not worth living. Life already was very hard for her. But according to 1 Samuel 1:6, 7, what added problem did she have?

Those who are closest to us often know how to hurt us the most. Peninnah⁶ kept insulting Hannah. This made Hannah's life bitter. The Bible verse shows that the insults were designed to make Hannah angry. Year after year, the story repeated. We should notice that the Hebrew word for the action of Peninnah ("provoked" [made a person angry] [NKJV], "taunt" [insult; tease in a cruel way] [NJB]) often is used in the Old

Testament to describe sins that make God angry (read Deuteronomy 9:18; Deuteronomy 31:29). This was not just a mean thing to say. This shows that Peninnah insulted Hannah to try to make her (Hannah) do something stupid. After all, Hannah was her only rival (enemy) for Elkanah's love (1 Samuel 1:5).

Quickly read through the first five or six chapters of the book of Job. Job's friends felt awful about what he experienced (read Job 2:12, 13). But how did they make the problem worse for him? What can we learn from this story about how not to react to another's grief?

Loss of things or of people close to us causes deep hurt. Illness or the terrible events of our lives may seem as if they are too much to deal with. They may cause us to feel hopeless. Sometimes living with deep desires that we never act on can take away our sense of hope. Things go from bad to worse when we have to face bad situations and people who seem to be good at making our lives very uncomfortable. Hannah's unfulfilled dreams and the cruel insults people said to her caused Hannah to cry to the Lord. Sometimes we need to shout out our hurt and frustrations before God. When we hit rock bottom, we need to search for answers outside of ourselves.

What are ways that we can encourage and uplift those who

5. leukemia—a very serious disease in which the body forms too many white blood cells.

6. Peninnah—Elkanah's second wife.

are going through hard times right now? What would you like people to do for you if you were going through something terrible? Why not do it for someone else?



When we hit rock bottom, we need to search for answers outside ourselves.

TUESDAY—OCTOBER 12

POURING YOUR HEART OUT (1 Samuel 1:9–16)

People can only suffer for so long. Action must be taken sooner or later. For some, this action happens without reason and even may be dangerous.

How did Hannah handle her pain in 1 Samuel 1:9–16? Describe the steps that Hannah took to deal with her pain.

This prayer was not a formal prayer or a general “please help me” kind of prayer. The passage describes Hannah’s prayer as “pouring out [her] soul to the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:15, NIV). The words *pouring out* normally are connected with the pouring of liquids, particularly blood and water

for sacrifices (offerings) (for example: Leviticus 4:7, 12, 18, 25, and so on). Pouring is often used to describe God’s actions. God can pour out judgment or blessings (Psalm 69:24; Psalm 79:6; Isaiah 42:25; and so on). The word has the meaning of plentifulness and fullness. In some Old Testament verses, the word is used in connection with prayer (Psalm 42:4, 5; Psalm 62:8, 9; Lamentations 2:19). This prayer of pouring out is perhaps the most earnest (serious and heartfelt) kind of prayer. It involves being very honest with God. It shows our deepest pains and fears. Hannah was so involved in her prayer that she was not aware of those around her and of what they might think of her. She was holding on to God like Jacob held on to his attacker (Jesus) through the night (Genesis 32:26, 27).



Hannah poured out her heart to the Lord.

Describe the quick results of Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 1:17, 18.

God does not always answer our prayers quickly. But when we pour

out our hearts before Him, we can be sure that He hears and will answer us (Psalm 37:4) in His own time and way. Understanding this can give us hope and faith as we wait for God's leading in our future.

In 1 Samuel 1:11, Hannah makes a big promise. If God hears and answers her prayer and gives her a son, she will give her son back to God. In the Old Testament we find many people making promises to the Lord. Promises are often part of worship and are similar to prayer and praise.

Hannah's promise is huge (big). The son that she wants so much will have to be given up. What would happen to Hannah's position as the wife of Elkanah? What would happen to her standing in Elkanah's family?

How often do you pour out yourself to God in prayer? Why is that so important for your spiritual walk? What keeps you from doing this as often as you need? Why not do it now? No doubt you have painful and pressing needs. Who does not?

WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 13

SINGING HIS PRAISES (1 Samuel 2:1–11)

Are you someone who sings when you are happy? The Bible often shows people singing at important moments in their lives. Miriam and the women of Israel sing at the shores of the

Red Sea after God's powerful miracle (Exodus 15:20, 21). In wonderful poetic language Deborah and Barak praise God's power over earthly kings and armies (Judges 5:1–31). When Mary visits her relative Elizabeth, she breaks out into a song of praise about God and His wonderful plan of salvation⁷ (Luke 1:46–55). All the songs appear at different times in history and in different situations. But they all share one thing in common. They all describe what happens when God steps into human⁸ history and answers the prayers of His children.

What is the main theme of Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1–11?

Hannah now knows without any doubt that God can control the results of history and her own personal experience. Hannah sees her life in a completely new way. She sees that some things that people work for are not very important and could be gone tomorrow. In her song, Hannah makes many comparisons,⁹ showing that things in life are not always as they appear. The arrow of the mighty warrior breaks, while the feeble (weak) "who trip and fall are made strong" (1 Samuel 2:4, NIV). Things we value are often not as important as we think they are.

Hannah has found that feeling safe and trusting that things will work out do not depend on what is happening around us. These things depend on knowing our God, who does not change. He is the One who tells us

7. plan of salvation—what God has done and is doing to save us from sin.

8. human—of, relating to, or affecting people.

9. comparisons—the act of showing how two or more things are the same or different.

that we each are special. He is the One who gives value to our lives.

Some people struggle with verse 6 in Hannah's song. How do we understand that? To understand this verse, we need to remember the basic Old Testament belief about life. This is so different from the modern worldview. God is the Creator of life. As the Creator, He has the right to do whatever He wants with His creation. In other words, nothing on this planet is outside of His control. This means that in the Bible even negative things are under God's control. Sometimes the writers of the Bible describe this thinking in a way that could suggest that God is involved in the bad things that happen to humans. In other words, what God permits, God "does."



Nothing on this planet is outside God's control.

What can you sing about? Write a list of things that you would like to praise God for. The more you praise God, the more thankful you will become for what He has done for you. That is why praise is so important (1 Samuel 2:21).

10. investment—using money to earn more money.

11. weaned—to start feeding a child food other than his or her mother's milk.

THURSDAY—OCTOBER 14

GOD'S INVESTMENT¹⁰ PLAN

Hannah leaves the tabernacle (temple) singing. But she also leaves behind little Samuel. She is no longer a woman without a child. But she still goes home to an empty house. With Hannah's son dedicated (given) to God and working for Him, who will look after her in her old age? With pure faith and trust, Hannah has given to God what is most important to her. Hannah reminds us of Abraham, another hero who was prepared to offer his son to God. As we already learned, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham and Sarah after Sarah had been without child for a long time. God tests Abraham's faith when Isaac is older. But Hannah decides on her own to give her son to God's service even before the child is born. After Samuel is weaned,¹¹ Hannah brings him to Shiloh. Can you imagine the feelings that his mother must have felt when she waved goodbye to him? And can you imagine how worried she must have been about leaving her son with Eli at a time when things were not going so well with him? And still she gave him to Eli, who would now be the teacher and guide of young Samuel.

According to 1 Samuel 2:21, how does God honor Hannah's faith and love?

Hannah could have refused to give

her boy to the Lord and selfishly held him back because he was her only son. But by giving him to God, Hannah received five more children. By giving Samuel to the Lord, Hannah also had a very strong influence¹² on Samuel himself. In time, Samuel became God's special spokesman and one of the greatest educators and leaders of Israel.

Read Matthew 6:19, 20 and Luke 12:16–21. According to these verses, what dangers do we face when we hold something back?

God is in the business of taking whatever we give to Him, making it grow, and adding to it more things than we ever would have dreamed. Hannah learned that the greatest treasures are only really safe when given to God. That which we hold back for ourselves here can be gone in a minute.

Hannah knew who she was in God's eyes. Understanding her own worth gave her the freedom to give.

We must remember that everything we have, all that we are, and all that we own, we have only because of God's grace¹³ and goodness to us. How can that thought help us be more giving with the Lord and less worried about holding back for ourselves? What does holding back tell us about ourselves, our character,¹⁴ and our trust in God?

12. influence—the power to change or affect someone or something.

13. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness that is not deserved) that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

14. character—the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves: someone's personality (who someone is).

15. stigmas—sets of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or a group of people have about something.

FRIDAY—OCTOBER 15

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “Parents, give your children to the Lord. Always teach them that they belong to Him, that they are the lambs of Christ's flock, and that the true Shepherd always watches over them. Hannah dedicated [gave] Samuel to the Lord. And ‘as Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him. He made everything Samuel said come true.’ 1 Samuel 3:19, NIV. Samuel is the best example of what God can do for the child if parents work with God, doing the work God has given them to do.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Counsels [Advice] to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, page 143.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Is anyone in your church experiencing hardships at home or in their personal lives? How can you either in a group or as an individual help to support these people? How much of yourself are you willing to sacrifice (give up) in order to help?
- ② What are some cultural stigmas¹⁵ in your society? For example, what are things that are judged to be terrible by your culture? Ask yourself, Are these things that God Himself also judges as bad? Are we, as a people, in danger of unfairly judging others because of culture? What are some examples where we have done that?