

Hannah's Prayer



Call to worship: (excerpts from Hannah's prayer)

My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my strength is lifted high. There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

Hymn: STF 186 Tell out my soul <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcFsxk1EbY4>

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his Name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy Name, the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

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Prayers:

Gracious God, we come today to praise and thank you, and to say sorry for the times when we have disobeyed you. You are a God of truth, so we come to praise and thank you. You are a God of mercy, so we come to praise and thank you.

Gracious God, as a mother loves her child, so you have loved us. We owe our very lives to you. You have watched us from our birth, tenderly nurturing us, showering us with love. When we have needed you, you have been there. You have given us strength in times of need, comfort in times of distress, encouragement in times of despair, guidance in times of uncertainty. Whatever we have faced, you have been with us.

Gracious God we have not always appreciated your love, all too often ignoring what you would teach us, disobeying your instructions, taking you for granted and wandering far from your side. Yet through it all your love has remained constant.

Gracious God, caring for us more than you care for yourself, sacrificing your all for our sakes, loving us with unquenchable love, you have called us all to be your children.

For all these great truths, we praise and thank you, in the name of Christ. AMEN

Reading: 1 Samuel 1:1-28 (Paraphrase attributed to ©BobHartman/engageworship.org)

Hannah was barren. And in the time and the place that Hannah lived, to be barren was to be cursed. But things are not always what they look like. Situations are not always what they seem. And God has a way of taking one thing and turning it into something completely different. Hannah was married to Elkanah – a man of means who could afford a second wife – Peninnah. And Peninnah, as it happens, was not barren at all. She had a brood of children, which she stood before Hannah, at every opportunity, to make her curse even worse. Elkanah was a good man. He saw, he understood, he longed to ease Hannah's pain. So when the family trooped from their home in Ramah to the holy place at Shiloh each year, and when they sat down to eat a portion of the meat that had been offered as a sacrifice to God, Elkanah always made sure that Hannah got a double helping of that meat – a special treat and, surely, the first recorded example of comfort eating. In spite of all her children, however (and as a powerful argument for monogamy!), Peninnah was jealous of this simple act of kindness. And she did all she could to make that a curse, as well. "It is God who has closed your womb," she would tell Hannah, there, in the presence of God himself, in his own holy place. And she would do this, not once, not twice, but again and again and again, right up to the time of the feast.

Poor Hannah would be so upset that she could not enjoy the treat her husband had planned for her. In fact, she could not eat at all. "Eat, Hannah, eat!" Elkanah would say. He meant well, but (being a man!) he ended up saying all the things a husband should never say to his wife when she is so unhappy she can't eat. "Why are you crying? Why are you so upset? You may not have any

children – but you have me!” One year, Hannah was so upset that she left the table altogether. She went to the door of the holy place, where Eli the priest was sitting. And there, through her tears, she offered up a prayer to God. “Look at me, Lord, please! See my misery. Remember my condition. And give me a son, I pray. For if you do, then I will give him back to you, and dedicate him as your servant for all the days of his life.” These words were hard words. So hard that she could not speak them out loud. Hannah’s lips moved, her tears flowed, and the old priest Eli (another man!) assumed that she was drunk. “Sober up, woman!” he said. “This is neither the time nor the place. Take your bottle and go home!” Hannah could not believe this. All she wanted was help, and here was another curse. “Drunk?” she cried. “Is that what you think? I’m not drunk! In fact, I can hardly eat or drink a thing! I’m here to pray – that’s all – to pour out my grief and my troubles before the Lord.” “I see,” said Eli, sorry not only for her sadness but for his mistake as well. “Then go in peace. And may the God of Israel give you what you asked for.” It was a blessing. A blessing, at last. Hard won, to be sure. But a blessing and not a curse. So Hannah went. And Hannah had something to eat. And when she saw her husband, she smiled. And when they returned to Ramah, she lay with him and conceived and gave birth to a son and called him Samuel – a name which means “God heard me”. When Samuel was old enough, she took him back to Shiloh, back to the old priest Eli. And though it sounds like the act of a crazy woman, or a drunk woman, she left her only son there to serve in the holy place. A blessing in return for a blessing. A blessing, and not a curse.

Hymn: STF 51 Great is thy faithfulness <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErwiBz1QA4o>

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not,
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness!

Great is thy faithfulness!

*Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided -
great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!*

Summer and winter, and spring-time and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Chorus

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Chorus

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Message: Hannah’s prayer

Your best friend comes to you and says, “I’ve been praying about something for weeks, and God still hasn’t answered my prayer.” How would you respond? We may all have experienced this at one time or another.

Today is Mothering Sunday and I want use the story of Hannah who had lost all hope that she could be mother to illustrate how God does answer prayer.

Hannah was a woman who had prayed to God, for years, and God had not answered her prayers....yet.

Her husband, Elkanah was a respectable God-fearing man, who was probably quite affluent as he had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Polygamy was permitted in Old Testament times. It ensured there was succession and children to support the work within a family, and at a time when many young men were killed in battle, it meant that women who would otherwise be made destitute were supported. However, this did not necessarily make for happy families, and this was certainly the case with Hannah and Peninnah.

We don’t know which of Elkanah’s wives was his first and which was his second wife. However, we do know that Hannah was infertile, unable to give him any children, and Peninnah had at least 4 children, (references to sons and daughters).

Infertility today is a great sadness to many couples. In Old Testament times, it was seen as a failure, a social disgrace. Elkanah could have legitimately divorced her. Hannah could have offered one of her servant women to sleep with her husband and so produce a child in her place. However, Elkanah does neither, and remains lovingly devoted to Hannah despite the potential social criticism and rights under civil law.

Elkanah tried to console Hannah, to show her how much he loved her, but Peninnah’s taunts make her position intolerable. This was certainly not a happy household.

You can possibly imagine the scene, when year after year, the entire family travel to Shiloh to offer sacrifice at the required festivals. Possibly with one more child in Peninnah's arms and still no baby for Hannah to hold. It is thought that the festival that the family were attending in this story, was the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast celebrated God's care for his people during the wilderness years as they approached Canaan, but also joy and feasting for God's blessing over that year's crops. This would have made Hannah's sorrow over her infertility all the more poignant, as the people celebrated the fertility of the land.

Hannah comes to the tabernacle and whilst everyone else is feasting and celebrating, she sits quietly in a dim corner, weeping and praying to God – one-to-one. She makes a promise with God, "if you give me a son, I will offer him to your service for his entire life." And she promises that he will never cut his hair, a sign of commitment to work for God.

How often do we try and bargain with God? If you give me this, then I will do that? God is not someone to be bartered with, however, when our prayers are answered, do we keep our side of the bargain, or do we conveniently forget that part? God always keeps his promises, do we keep ours?

Hannah did keep her promise, and not just for a limited time, for his entire life. Samuel, when he was around three years old was given to the care of Eli, and became the last and one of the greatest judges of Old Testament times, and led the way for kings Saul and David to lead the Jewish nation.

This promise was personally extremely costly to Hannah, Samuel was the one thing she most wanted in the world, yet she was willing to keep her promise and offer him to God.

So what can we learn from the story of Hannah?

The purpose of the story of Hannah, is not that God will always remove infertility or physical problem. Sadly, we all know couples who have remained childless despite the advances in medical science.

The purpose of the story is that Hannah, and we, are encouraged to have a belief in the power of prayer. Hannah could well have felt bitter and discouraged; she was unable to have children, she had to share her husband with a woman who taunted and ridiculed her, her husband couldn't solve her problem as much as he tried. Instead of giving up hope, Hannah came to God in prayer, in a quiet unassuming way. She honestly and frankly brought her situation to God. She probably got angry with God, she laid it out before God and didn't try to pretend everything was OK.

God does answer prayer, in his time and for his purposes. Do we sometimes feel impotent in our pray life? If you have an "unanswered prayer list," remember Hannah.

God never leaves prayers unanswered, just in his way and his timing and his purpose. If God had immediately answered Hannah's prayers and given her a son, she would not have placed him at the tabernacle at Shiloh to grow into a man of God, in the public gaze, ready for leadership

God is sovereign. He can overrule events, even when it seems impossible. The story of Hannah illustrates how God works with problems everyday life and, contrary to natural expectations, brings about surprising reversals.

But, a word of warning. Think about what you pray for, the motives and the consequences. Hannah promised her son to God. She followed through on her promise, as painful as that was. What does our prayer cost us? Are we prepared to make sacrifice for God? Do we put a time limit on it, or do we like Hannah offer our entire lives to God?

Hymn: STF 156 From the breaking of the dawn <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WKeaL2kM7Jk>

From the breaking of the dawn
to the setting of the sun,
I will stand on every promise of your word.
Words of power, strong to save,
that will never pass away;
I will stand on every promise of your word.
For Your covenant is sure,
and on this I am secure:
I can stand on every promise of your word.

When I stumble and I sin,
condemnation pressing in,
I will stand on every promise of your word.

You are faithful to forgive,
that in freedom I might live,
so I stand on every promise of your word.
Guilt to innocence restored;
you remember sins no more.
So I'll stand on every promise of your word.

When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
and I'll stand on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,
you will guide me with your hand
as I stand on every promise of your word.

And you've promised to complete
every work begun in me,
so I'll stand on every promise of your word.

Hope that lifts me from despair,
love that casts out every fear
as I stand on every promise of your word.

Not forsaken, not alone,
for the Comforter has come,
and I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
grace for all who will believe.
We will stand on every promise of your word.

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Prayers:

Gracious

God, we thank you for the gift of children, the joy, the laughter, and the fun they bring in so many ways.
We thank you for their innate zest for life – the interest, excitement and fascination they find in so much we count as ordinary.
We thank you for their special qualities – their innocence, trust, enthusiasm, energy and sheer hunger to learn.

We pray for those who are parents, that they may show love and care, guidance and patience. May they support and nurture those in their care, and when the time is right know when to let their children go into the world in the knowledge that you are their heavenly Father.

We pray for those who act as parent to children whose own biological parents are no longer able or willing to care for them. We thank you for the commitment and love shown to children who are sometimes scarred and wounded by events in their lives.

We pray for those who are childless and who have longed for children. Reach out to them in their pain and frustration, their disappointment and their anger. Help them not to lose hope, and give them the comfort you alone can bring.

We pray for those who have lost a child, of whatever age. Gracious and merciful God comfort those who grieve. Whether the loss is recent or many years ago, the pain never goes, and the memories never fade. Comfort those who mourn.

We pray for ourselves as we acknowledge you as our loving Parent, one who guides and encourages, who disciplines and forgives, one who loves us unconditionally.

In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who welcomed children into his arms. AMEN

Hymn: CMP 988/ S of F 780 How deep the Fathers love <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gdy8Bu8Cg0>

How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure.
How great the pain of searing loss -
The Father turns His face away,
As wounds which mar the Chosen One
Bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon a cross,
My sin upon His shoulders;
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice
Call out among the scoffers.

It was my sin that held Him there
Until it was accomplished;
His dying breath has brought me life -
I know that it is finished.

I will not boast in anything,
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,
His death and resurrection.
Why should I gain from His reward?
I cannot give an answer;
But this I know with all my heart -
His wounds have paid my ransom.

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Blessing: May we always know the love of God for us as a parent loves their child. May we have the courage to put his ways above all others. And may we be always blessed with the grace of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, AMEN