

1 Samuel – Week 2 – A Prayer Answered – Bible Study Helps

Title: A Prayer Answered

Sermon Summary: Drawing from 1 Samuel chapter 1, this sermon explores the story of Hannah, a barren woman living in a spiritually corrupt era resembling the book of Judges, where every man did what was right in his own eyes. Hannah endured profound suffering, including the provocation of a rival wife, misunderstanding from her husband, and misjudgment from the priest Eli. Yet God had sovereignly ordained her pain for a greater purpose: to raise up the prophet Samuel at a critical moment in Israel's history. The sermon emphasizes that God's plans are always larger than our own understanding, that prayer can change the person even before it changes the circumstance, and that answered prayer brings responsibility. Hannah's willingness to dedicate Samuel back to God illustrates the principle that children and all gifts from God are not ultimately ours to keep, but to steward for His glory. True worship is demonstrated when we surrender what matters most to us into God's hands.

Key Points:

- God sovereignly orchestrated Hannah's barrenness as part of His larger plan to provide Israel with a prophet, demonstrating that suffering often serves a divine purpose beyond what we can see
- Praying to the Lord of hosts means bringing requests before the God of heavenly armies who is all-powerful and fully capable of intervening in human circumstances
- Jewish vows made to God were serious and binding, as supported throughout Scripture, and Hannah's vow to return her son to the Lord reflected genuine surrender
- Prayer does not always immediately change the circumstance, but it can change the person facing the circumstance, as evidenced by Hannah's countenance being no more sad before God had yet provided her son
- God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours, meaning His answers to prayer are often larger and more purposeful than what we originally requested
- Children are a heritage of the Lord, and Christian parents are stewards rather than ultimate owners of the children God entrusts to them
- Answered prayer brings responsibility, and faithfulness requires following through on commitments made to God even when doing so is costly
- True worship involves surrendering what matters most to us into God's hands, trusting Him with outcomes we cannot control

Scripture Reference:

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- 1 Samuel 1 (primary passage)
- 1 Peter 5:8, regarding the adversary seeking to cause anxiety and worry
- Numbers 30, regarding a husband's authority to establish or annul a wife's vow
- Psalm 65:1, regarding the performance of vows to God
- Ecclesiastes 5:2-5, regarding the seriousness of vows made before God
- Isaiah 55:6-9, regarding God's thoughts and ways being higher than ours
- Philippians 4:6-7, regarding prayer, supplication, and the peace of God that surpasses understanding
- Psalm 127:3, regarding children as a heritage of the Lord
- Genesis 31:13, God reminding Jacob of the vow he made at Bethel

Stories:

- Hannah's years of barrenness, provocation by Peninnah, misunderstanding by both Elkanah and Eli, and her fervent prayer at Shiloh, which resulted in the birth and subsequent dedication of the prophet Samuel
- Jacob's vow made at Bethel and God's later reminder to fulfill it, illustrating the lasting seriousness of promises made to God
- Jephthah's rash vow in Judges 11, cited as a cautionary example of hasty promises made before God
- Moses' mother placing infant Moses in an ark among the bulrushes to save his life, ultimately resulting in Pharaoh's daughter returning the child to his own mother to nurse, illustrating God's providential care when parents surrender their children to Him
- The pastor's personal account of the church's founding journey through Tuscarawas County, passing through Bolivar and eventually returning there, used to illustrate how God's plans unfold over time in ways that surpass our original understanding
- Brief references to Samson's barren mother, Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptist, and Mary the mother of Jesus, as additional biblical examples of mothers entrusted with children set apart for God's purposes

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Discipleship Questions

Hannah experienced years of unanswered prayer before God intervened at precisely the right moment -- how does her story challenge or reshape the way you personally respond when God's timing does not align with your own expectations?

The sermon points out that the Lord had shut up Hannah's womb as part of a larger divine purpose, suggesting that God sometimes allows prolonged suffering to position His people for greater work -- in what ways does this truth both comfort and challenge your understanding of pain in your own life?

Hannah poured out her soul to God in silent, heartfelt prayer, and her countenance changed before anything in her circumstances actually changed -- what does this reveal about the relationship between genuine prayer and the peace that God promises in Philippians 4:6-7?

Eli completely misunderstood Hannah's situation, yet she responded with grace and humility rather than anger or defensiveness -- how does her response challenge you in moments when you feel misunderstood by those in positions of spiritual authority or leadership?

Hannah made a vow to give her son back to God before she even conceived him, demonstrating a willingness to surrender the very thing she most desired -- what does this kind of surrender look like practically in your own relationship with God?

The sermon emphasizes that God's answer to Hannah's prayer was not just about giving her a son but about providing Israel with a prophet, revealing that God's purposes are far greater than our individual requests -- how does this perspective shift the way you approach prayer and what you ask God for?

Hannah entrusted Samuel to the care of Eli, a priest whose household was corrupt and whose sons were wicked, yet she still fulfilled her vow -- what does this tell us about the nature of true faith and what it means to genuinely give something or someone over to God's care?

The sermon draws a parallel between Hannah dedicating Samuel and Christian parents dedicating their children to the Lord, arguing that children are gifts from God to be stewarded for His purposes rather than possessed -- how does this biblical view of parenthood or mentorship reshape your sense of responsibility toward the children in your life?

Several women in Scripture -- Hannah, Samson's mother, Elizabeth, and Mary -- were called to raise children for extraordinary divine purposes, often at great personal cost -- what common thread of faith do you observe in their stories, and how does that thread speak to what God might be calling you to sacrifice or steward today?

The sermon concludes by noting that Hannah's story is not ultimately about getting what she wanted but about trusting God with what mattered most to her -- in what area of your life is God currently inviting you to move from petition to surrender, and what would it look like to worship Him there?

Small Group Guide

"A Prayer Answered" | 1 Samuel 1

Before You Begin

Encourage group members to open their Bibles to 1 Samuel 1. Read the chapter together before diving into discussion. Remind the group that the goal is not simply to discuss ideas but to apply God's Word to daily life.

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

- Hannah's suffering was not accidental. The Bible twice states that the Lord had shut up her womb, indicating that God was sovereignly orchestrating events for a greater purpose.
 - Prayer does not always immediately change the circumstance. Sometimes prayer changes the person facing the circumstance.
 - Hannah had peace before God's provision. Her countenance changed not when Samuel was born, but when she left her burden with God.
 - Vows made to God are serious. The Bible consistently teaches that what is promised to God ought to be fulfilled.
 - God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours. Hannah thought she was asking for a son. God was preparing a prophet for an entire nation.
 - Children are gifts from God, but they are ultimately His. Parents are stewards, not owners, of the lives God places in their care.
 - Answered prayer brings responsibility. When God gives a gift, He expects it to be used for His purposes and His glory.
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Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Think of a time when you prayed for something for a long time without seeing an answer. How did that season affect your faith? How did it affect the way you prayed?

Understanding the Passage

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2. The Bible says twice that the Lord had shut up Hannah's womb. What does that tell us about God's involvement in the painful circumstances of our lives? How does that truth bring comfort, even when it is difficult to accept?
3. Hannah is described as being in bitterness of soul, yet she brought that pain directly to God in prayer rather than isolating herself or giving up. What made the difference in how she responded to her suffering?
4. Eli completely misunderstood Hannah's situation, yet Hannah responded with grace rather than anger or bitterness. What does her response reveal about her spiritual condition at that moment? What does it look like in our own lives when we respond to misunderstanding with grace?
5. After Eli told Hannah to go in peace and trust God, her countenance changed before anything in her circumstances changed. What does that tell us about the relationship between prayer and peace? How does Philippians 4:6-7 speak to this?
6. The sermon drew attention to the seriousness of vows in Scripture, referencing passages in Genesis, Judges, Numbers, Psalms, and Ecclesiastes. Why do you think God treats vows so seriously? How should this shape the way we make commitments to God?
7. Hannah gave Samuel back to God even though the environment at the temple, under Eli and his corrupt sons, was far from ideal. What does this teach us about trusting God with what we give Him, even when the circumstances around that gift are imperfect?

Going Deeper

8. The sermon made the point that God's plans are always bigger than ours. Hannah thought she needed a son. God needed a prophet. Can you think of a time in your own life when God answered a prayer in a way that was far bigger than what you originally asked for?
9. The sermon said, "Hannah's story is not ultimately about getting what she wanted. It is about trusting God with what matters most to her life. That is true worship." How does this challenge or redefine the way you think about worship and sacrifice in your own life?
10. The sermon mentioned several mothers in Scripture, including Moses' mother, Samson's mother, Elizabeth, and Mary, all of whom were called to surrender their children to God's purposes. What does the consistent theme of surrender throughout Scripture say to us about what God values in His people?

Practical Applications

For Everyone

- Identify one area of your life where you have been carrying a burden rather than genuinely leaving it with God. This week, take time to pour out your heart to God about that specific burden. Practice trusting Him with the outcome rather than trying to control it.
- Examine any commitments or vows you have made to God. Are there promises you have made that you have not fulfilled? Take an honest inventory and seek to honor what you have committed.

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For Parents

- Take time this week, either as a couple or individually, to formally dedicate your children to the Lord in prayer. Acknowledge before God that your children are His gifts, that you are stewards of their lives, and that your goal is to raise them for His purposes and His glory.
- Consider what it practically looks like in your home to raise your children for the Lord rather than simply for your own hopes and expectations. What needs to change in your daily rhythms to reflect that priority?

For Everyone Facing Prolonged Difficulty

- Write down the specific situation in which you have been waiting on God. Next to it, write out the truth from Isaiah 55:8-9, summarized as the reminder that God's thoughts and ways are far higher than ours. Return to that note each day this week as a reminder to trust His plan over your own understanding.

Closing Reflection

The sermon closed with this challenge: Where are you at with the Lord right now? What do you need to trust Him with?

Close your small group time by giving each member a moment to silently answer that question before God. Then close in prayer together, asking God to give each person the same peace Hannah experienced, the kind that comes not from changed circumstances but from a surrendered heart.

Suggested Memory Verse for the Week

Philippians 4:6-7 -- The reminder that we are to bring everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving, and that His peace, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

5-Day Bible Reading and Devotional Guide

Based on the Themes of 1 Samuel 1: A Prayer Answered

Day 1: When God Seems Silent Reading: 1 Samuel 1:1-8

Devotional: Hannah's pain was real. Year after year, she carried a burden that no one around her fully understood. Her husband loved her but could not comprehend the depth of her sorrow. Her adversary provoked her without mercy. Yet the Bible twice tells us that the Lord had shut up her womb. God was not absent. He was not indifferent. He was sovereignly at work in what appeared to be silence and closed doors. When your circumstances seem unchanged despite your prayers, remember that God's silence is not God's absence. He sees every tear. He knows every ache. Trust Him in the waiting.

Reflection: What burden have you been carrying that feels as though God has not yet answered? Write it down and surrender it to Him today in prayer.

Day 2: Pouring Out Your Soul Reading: Psalm 62:1-8; Philippians 4:6-7

Devotional: Hannah did not suppress her grief. She brought it directly to God, pouring out her soul before Him in prayer. She wept. She spoke from her heart. Her lips moved but her voice was not heard by those around her, yet God heard every word. The Bible describes this kind of prayer as the right response to suffering. Philippians 4:6-7 tells us that when we bring everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds. Hannah walked away from that altar no longer sad, not because her circumstance had changed, but because she had truly given it to God.

Reflection: Is there something you have been carrying in your own strength rather than bringing to God in honest, heartfelt prayer? Come before Him today without pretense and pour out your soul.

Day 3: God's Plans Are Greater Than Ours Reading: Isaiah 55:6-11; Jeremiah 29:11-13

Devotional: Hannah prayed for a son. God was preparing a prophet for an entire nation. She could not see the full picture. She only knew her pain and her longing. But God, in His infinite wisdom, was weaving together her personal suffering and Israel's desperate need into one extraordinary plan. Isaiah reminds us that God's thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. What looks like unanswered prayer from our limited perspective may in fact be the

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very thing God is using to accomplish something far beyond what we could ask or imagine. His plans are always larger, always better, and always on time.

Reflection: In what area of your life do you need to release your own agenda and trust that God's greater purpose is unfolding, even when you cannot see it?

Day 4: Faithful to the Vow Reading: Ecclesiastes 5:2-5; Numbers 30:1-2; Psalm 65:1-2

Devotional: When God answered Hannah's prayer, she did not quietly forget the promise she had made. She kept her word. She weaned Samuel, prepared her sacrifice, made the journey to Shiloh, and placed her young son into Eli's care. Every step of that journey must have cost her something. But she had made a vow to the Lord, and the Bible is clear that vows made before God are serious matters. The same God who was faithful to give her what she asked was worthy of her faithfulness in return. God's gifts always carry responsibility. What He entrusts to us, He expects us to steward for His glory and not merely for our own comfort.

Reflection: Has God answered a prayer or entrusted you with a gift that you have not yet fully surrendered back to His purposes? What step of faithfulness is He calling you to take today?

Day 5: True Worship Is Surrender Reading: Romans 12:1-2; 1 Samuel 1:27-28

Devotional: Hannah's story ends not with her holding tightly to what she had received, but with open hands. She brought Samuel to the house of the Lord and declared, for this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord. This is the picture of true worship. It is not merely singing or attending a service. It is placing what matters most on the altar and trusting God with the outcome. Romans 12:1-2 calls every believer to present themselves as a living sacrifice. Hannah did exactly that. She gave God her greatest treasure, and in doing so, she gave God her greatest act of worship.

Reflection: What is the one thing in your life that you have been most reluctant to surrender to God? Bring it to Him today as an act of worship, trusting that He is faithful and His purposes are good.