

8 Being Honest with God Hannah

1 Samuel 1

As you grow in maturity, God's will, God's purposes, God's honor will increasingly concern you. But however mature you may become, you will never cease to have griefs and joys of your own. If prayer that concerns God's honor is to be called higher prayer, I must make it clear that you must never stop appealing to God about your sorrows and heartaches. Lower prayer, if we adopt such an expression, will be necessary as long as you live. 'Have no anxiety about anything,' writes Paul to the Philippian church, 'but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God' (Philippians 4:6)."

GROUP DISCUSSION. In what ways can suffering strengthen a Christian's faith? Particularly discuss ways in which it might cause people to pray differently or discourage them from praying.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. Reread the paragraph at the top of this page. Reflect on how balanced your prayer life is between prayer for your own circumstances and needs, and concern for God's honor, will and wider purposes.

Not only is God interested in big issues such as the morality of a nation, how we treat the poor and whether the gospel is being preached; he is also intimately concerned about every single life. *Read 1 Samuel 1.*

1. What evidence is there in the passage of faithful and godly living by Elkanah and his family?

2. Many of the prayers studied so far are for other people-leaders, nations and the lost. List the ways in which this story illustrates God's concern for individual believers and their needs.

3. We often feel conflict between what we want and what we think God wants, and may have mixed motives when we pray. What internal conflicts or mixed motives might Hannah have experienced as she prayed?

4. How do you think the way that God answers our prayer is affected by the purity of our motives?

5. Verses 10-16 demonstrate Hannah's honesty in prayer to God. She does not hide her feelings, pain, hurt or desire. In a similar situation, what might prevent us from being this direct with God?

6. It is often hard for us to understand other people's suffering. Eli's blessing in verse 17 is very different in tone from his initial reaction to Hannah in verses 13-14. How and why do his views of her change throughout the story?

7. According to the passage, how did Hannah view the child she was asking for?

8. The child God gave Hannah was Samuel, one of the most significant leaders in Israel's history. How do you understand the relationship between God's purposes and our personal circumstances?

9. Compare verse 18 with verses 6-16. How do you explain Hannah's change of mood and apparent sense of assurance?

10. Verses 21-28 detail the events after Hannah's prayer was answered. However, the actions of Hannah and Elkanah relate back to the promise Hannah made in verse 11. What does this teach us about their character as believers?

11. Sometimes we can be hesitant to take personal requests to God. Looking back over the passage, in what ways does the example of Hannah and her household give us confidence in prayer?

12. When are you hesitant to take personal requests before God?

Give thanks for the example of Hannah, and ask God to help you grow spiritually through your personal circumstances-be they easy or difficult. You may also like to express to God things about your personal circumstances that you have found it difficult to verbalize before.

Now or Later

Silently read and reflect on 1 Samuel 2:1-10, noting particularly any aspects of the passage that encourage you