

## Home Groups

Worship: Usually I set you a Psalm, be daring and try instead 1 Sam 2.1-10.

## Welcome & Word.

1. Read 1 Sam 1.1
2. How did the All Age talk differ from this one?
3. I asked the school children to spot the bully. Who's the bully? What does Hannah do about it?
4. How does Eli help / hinder the situation?
5. 1 Sam 1.23 seems to me to be an odd phrase surely the Lord has already made good His word. What do you make of it? (Answers welcomed!)
6. What does Hannah believe about God? (Split into pairs and divvy up her first prayer and her psalm, there's a lot here).
7. Why does Hannah pray?
8. What does Hannah pray?
9. How does Hannah pray?
10. How does Hannah encourage / challenge the way that we pray

Works: Pray! Not least for this country but also for what is on your heart.

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What we **believe** about God **affects** what we **pray** about and **how** we pray.

Hannah is living at a time when everyone **does their own thing**. All sorts of different people live in the land and lots of them worship their **own local baal**, or they worship different baals, a baal for the harvest, a baal for rain or they worship Ashtoreth as a fertility goddess. Everyone does their own thing. Add to that how there is no government, no king, nothing to rally the 12 tribes around. Hannah has **everything a 11C bc woman could want**. She has a good husband who's quite well off and has good social standing. Add to that that her husband is a godly man.

But she doesn't have any **children**. Perhaps that wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't for **Peninnah** always winding her up and rubbing salt in her wounds. The affect of Peninnah's bullying on Hannah is that she has lost her **appetite** and when she prays she weeps **bitterly**.

But Hannah has an **amazing faith**. She believes in a big God. This is the first time in the bible that God is referred to as The LORD Almighty, **Yahweh Sabaoth**, the Lord of Hosts, God of the Angel armies (Mssg). She believes in a big God.

Whereas others around her believe in a small god, a **baal for this valley**, a baal for that high place, a baal for this function or purpose. Hannah believes in the LORD Almighty. She believes, as we read in our sort of Psalm (1Sam2.1-10) in a God who **created** the foundations of the earth, a God who **brings death** – and in an astonishing allusion to life beyond death, or perhaps **resurrection**, she believes in the God who makes alive, who raises up.

She really has a **remarkable** faith. She believes in a big God who will **judge** not just this little village or valley, but the whole world.

And she **doesn't believe** in a god who does what he fancies, a capricious god but she believes in a **reliable God** who keeps His **promises**, who rules by **Justice**, a God who does the Right Thing. Hannah believes in a big God.

We forget this sometimes. We think of our faith as being **terribly useful** for ourselves, perhaps as a **coping mechanism**, a form of comfort through this difficult life – and fair enough I'm not going to knock that.

But we could do with remembering that God is not here for Me but rather **I am here for God**. The God that we worship, sent His Son **Jesus** Christ to live and die **not just for me** but for the world and not just the world at that time, but for all time and history forwards and backwards. We forget sometimes that the LORD Almighty is a big God.

But Hannah also believes in a **God who actually cares** about little her and her life and her worries. This big God who has such a big universe to manage and so many prayers to respond to, this God **cares about little me**. He notices the humble and the poor and He **lifts the needy** from the ash heap, from their grief and sorrow. So that Hannah concludes that there is **no Rock like our God**. If we **over do the Almighty** aspect of God then we can end up feeling that God must be **too busy** for me. Of course if we over do the **All-matey** aspect of God then we can forget that our God is a **big God**.

So Hannah prays and she believes that **God is worth talking to**, that God can **intervene** and help, that God cares. Her prayer is fuelled by **emotions**, yes, by her **bitterness** and **pain** but it is directed by her faith. Hannah has a tremendous faith. And she doesn't know half of what we know.

**How we pray** certainly shows up **what we believe**, what we **think God** is capable of doing, worth bothering Him about.

So sometimes people will say to me, You know **I never pray for myself** (as if that sounds somehow selfish) I only pray for the poor people in Africa. Well that's very good, but I wonder sometimes if it shows that you **don't really believe that God loves you**, He's bound to love poor people elsewhere but me? perhaps not. I'm sure that God would like to hear what's on your heart.

Hannah's faith is big and as a result she prays **passionately**, even to the point where her lips are moving but there are **no words coming out**. Eli thinks that she is **drunk** – you wonder how many drunk pray-ers he has had to deal with! But he quickly realises his mistake and he **blesses** her. And even later when she brings **Samuel** to the temple and **fulfils** her vow and commits him to Eli and to the service of the LORD Almighty, she then prays a prayer of **Thanksgiving** – my heart rejoices in the Lord!

I daresay that there was a mixed emotion of **joy and pain** as Hannah walks away from the temple, leaving behind her Samuel. Joy because God has been **faithful** and answered her prayer and pain because, well, this is **her little boy**. But the **primary** response of Hannah is that of praise and **rejoicing**.

A few years earlier when **Hannah was crying** and not eating and then she prays and Eli blesses her, we read how her face was **no longer downcast** and she ate something. Hannah has been heard. There is a huge amount of **release** in knowing that you've **been heard** by someone. I mean really heard. Double that and some more when you realise that you have been **heard by God**.

I remember being all in a **knot** about something and I prayed and prayed and then one day I prayed and I just felt as if I had been heard. A **huge weight lifted off** me, that Issue was no longer a big deal to me and I felt liberated and positively joyful. I was at a Scripture Union camp at the time, and others noticed

such a change in me over the next couple of days they found it really confusing. **What's come over James!**? I'm not sure what I would have said to them, I'm not sure I particularly knew, except that I felt as if I had been heard.

**2 things** need to happen for you to be heard. The first is that you need to be properly honest and communicate whatever you need to say fully. There are times when I speak to people and I know deep down that there is **something you're not telling me**, the Real thing that you would really like to talk about but not here, not now; perhaps you're not quite sure how to put it. It is really quite frustrating. More so for you than for me!

So in prayer for you to be heard, I mean **really heard**, you really need to say to God what it is you're feeling and thinking and going through.

**Hannah pours out her soul** to God, in bitterness of soul she wept much and prayed. It's just astonishing to read this sort of praying. It's **embarrassingly frank** and intimate. It's gorgeous and **we should learn to pray** like this ourselves. This doesn't mean you have to **cry a river** for every prayer you pray, this is to do with being **fully honest** and open before God. This is the first thing that needs to happen **if you're to be heard**.

The Next thing of course is that **the other person** needs to hear what you said. You've done the best you can in really saying what you need to say. **God cannot be confused** about what Hannah wants or how she feels. So now its **over to the Hearer**. The Hearer then has to hear and understand and take it on board.

With a person you often feel heard because that person will **say nice** things to you like There there, or perhaps less patronising, they will say **So if I understand you, then this** is what is upsetting you right now? We don't know if God said anything to Hannah. Maybe He did but I'd've thought that that would be recorded. So I suggest to you that **God didn't say anything to Hannah**.

But **Hannah believes**. She really believes **in a big God** and in a God who really cares **even for little her**. And so after **offloading** her soul to God she feels so much better, she feels heard, she **feels so very heard** that she walks out with a **smile** and her **appetite** renewed.

Hannah is an **example** to us in how to pray. And she is a challenge too. **Hannah believes** and because she believes, that faith **affects what she prays** about, what she thinks God is interested in, and her faith affects **how she prays** because she really believes in a God who really listens.

A while back someone said to me Gosh **you really believe** this stuff don't you! And I said Yes, I really do believe it. That doesn't mean that Hannah has all the answers or that she doesn't **struggle** with doubt and questions.

It means she **believes in a big God**, who really cares and that **shapes how she prays**. So my prayer today is **May our faith shape how we pray** and may we come to pray with the **same passionate intensity** as Hannah. Amen.