

THE EXAMPLE OF A PRAYING MOTHER

By

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PRAY ABOUT YOUR PROBLEMS

The Bible is an amazingly practical book. It meets man where he is, in the midst of the daily problems of life, and guides him in the right way.

It deals with the mental problems of insecurity, guilt, jealousy, etc. It deals with the personal problems of finances, food, clothing, and shelter. It deals with the spiritual problems of guilt, forgiveness, and acceptance before God. It deals with the family problems which people face day by day.

I want to introduce you to a woman who dealt successfully with a severe family problem. From a review of her problem, her wrestlings with it, and the solution she found, you and I can discover the right way to deal with our problems. I call this series of studies, "The Example of a Praying Mother."

I introduce to you a woman named Hannah. She lived in ancient times in the period known as "the times of the Judges of Israel." Hannah was a married woman. Her husband's name was Elkanah. They were Jewish people, living in the territory assigned to the tribe of Ephraim in the land of Palestine. Hannah was a fortunate woman, for her husband loved her dearly. However, Hannah had a problem which so burdened her that all her blessings became burdens.

Hannah and Elkanah lived in a time when polygamy was common. Elkanah had a second wife, whose name was Peninnah. Therein lay the pain of Hannah's problem. Peninnah was a fruitful wife to Elkanah. She bore sons and daughters to her husband. Hannah was barren and bore no child. The burden of Hannah's barrenness was aggravated by the rebuke and ridicule heaped on her by Peninnah, her adversary. The Biblical record states, "*Her adversary provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb*" I Sam. 1:6.

Elkanah was a devoutly religious man. He took all his family to the special religious observances held at the tabernacle of God in Shiloh. The nearness of God's presence in those festivals made Hannah's heart the heavier. "*She was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore*" I Sam. 1:10. It was at that very point that Hannah set an example for us to follow. Her example plainly counsels us to pray about our problems.

Problems will arise. They come to every one. Someone wisely observed, "God had one Son without sin, but He has no son without sorrow." Man is an imperfect person, living in an imperfect society. Problems are the consequence of that imperfection.

The patriarch Job testified, "*Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble*" Job 14:1. He is troubled by the wicked and grows weary with his lot in life Job 3:17. Job knew by experience that life on earth is no easy "bed of roses."

Jesus bore witness to the same truth, saying, "*These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*" John 16:33.

You will face problems. Like Hannah, you will have desires which go unfulfilled. You will have adversaries who delight to add to your misery. You may often weep before the Lord. That does not mean God has forsaken you, nor that He is unconcerned about you. It rather means you are human and suffering the trials which are "common to man" I Cor. 10:13.

Problems can drive you from God or turn you to God.

Hannah's problem turned her to God. There at the tabernacle of God in Shiloh, she prayed to God for release from her barrenness. She testified to Eli, the high priest, "*I have poured out my soul before the Lord...for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken*" I Sam. 1:15, 16. Hannah was following a principle expressed in the Christian hymn, "Take your burdens to the Lord and leave it there."

The Biblical record indicates that Hannah's grief was aggravated when she went to worship. There was an erroneous idea in that day that childlessness was a curse of God upon a woman. That sense of God's judgment, with the aggravation of Peninnah, made the trips to the house of God sheer agony for Hannah. But it was there in the house of God that she found the answer to her problem.

Cain illustrates how a problem can turn a person from God. When God rejected Cain's offering because there was a sin in his life, Cain turned even further from God by the murder of his righteous brother rather than seeking forgiveness Gen. 4.

Your problems will turn you from God or turn you to God. Hannah's example, with all the testimony of Holy Scripture, encourages you to "*take your burden to the Lord and leave it there.*"

Problems are solved in the presence of God.

Second Kings, chapter nineteen, recounts the experience of Hezekiah, king of Judah. His country was invaded by the fearful Assyrian army under the command of Sennacherib. The land was overrun. Jerusalem was placed under siege. Apart from the direct intervention of God, overthrow was imminent. Sennacherib's commanding field officer sent a letter to Hezekiah blaspheming of God of Judah and demanding immediate unconditional surrender. Hezekiah took the letter into the temple, laid it before the Lord, and asked God to intervene. God sent the prophet Isaiah to tell the king that his prayer was heard, the city was spared, and there was no need to fear. That very night a terrible plague broke out in the army of the Assyrians, their numbers were so decimated that they lifted the siege of Jerusalem and returned home. Yes, problems are solved in the presence of God.

That was a truth Hannah learned by personal experience. She prayed, God have her assurance through the words of Eli (the high priest) that her prayer was heard. She wept no more. Her burden was gone. She found the answer to her problem in the presence of God.

"Take your burden to the Lord, and leave it there."

Problems are conquered by faith in God.

Thank God for the privilege of enjoying a solution before it is actually received. Hannah prayed in the temple. The priest sought her out for counsel concerning her petition. She told him her heart. He said, "*Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him*" I Sam. 1:17. She accepted by faith that God would answer her prayer. "*So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad*" I Sam. 1:18.

Thank God for the victory which is received by faith. I have experienced the assurance that an answer was on its way before it ever arrived. I have heard the testimony of other Christians who have had the same experience. You can enjoy the victory of faith as you pray about your problems, commit them to God, accept the truth of His interest and involvement, and surrender the solution to His control. The Bible says faith is the victory that overcomes the world I John 5:4.

"Father, thank you that you are concerned about us and about every circumstance in our lives. Thank you that you have not left us alone, but are involved in the midst of our daily affairs. Teach us to pray and trust in the midst of our problems and for the supply of our needs. Let us know by experience that it is good to draw near to God, and teach us to put all our trust in the Lord God. Make us a people of prayer. For Jesus' sake. Amen."

PRAY IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

You can meet God any place you seek Him. Someone has testified, "I have worshipped in church and chapel, I have prayed on the busy street. I have sought my God and found Him where the waves of the ocean beat. I have knelt in the silent forest, in the shade of some ancient

tree; But the dearest of all my altars was reared at my mother's knee." The tender sentiment testifies to the truth that God is found wherever a man's heart is set to meet Him personally.

There is a special place for prayer, however. A place which God has designated as a unique place of His choice. God seems to take special delight in meeting His people in that "house of prayer."

Hannah, an ancient citizen of the Hebrew nation, set an example for us to follow. She went to the tabernacle of the Lord, the house of God, for occasions of special petition before God. In the following that "Example of a Praying Mother," we find the importance of the church as the place for us to seek God in prayer.

The house of God is "A house of prayer for all nations."

Many things happened in the precincts of the tabernacle and temple in the Bible days. There sacrifices were offered. There the Word of God was taught. There the people were ministered to regarding their daily needs. There the poor were supplied. But one ministry at the house of God was more important than any other. At the house of God (whether it was called tabernacle or temple) prayer was offered to God.

Prayer was offered when sacrifices were made. Prayer was offered when the Word was taught. Prayer was offered when people were served. Prayer was offered when the poor were supplied. Prayer was offered many times each day in that holy "house of prayer."

God himself called His house a place of prayer. Isaiah 56:7 reads, "*Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.*" Twice in that one verse God called the temple a "house of prayer." He clearly declared it to be "an house of prayer for all people."

Jesus took up the theme and declared God's house to be for the primary purpose of prayer. He drove the money-changers and merchandisers from the temple with these words, "*It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer*" Matt. 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46. Communion with God is the heart of worship. Prayer is the way to commune with God. Therefore, every place of worship must be a place where prayer is prominent.

Hannah was broken-hearted over her childless condition. She went to the tabernacle of God at Shiloh, poured out her soul in petition to Him, received assurance that He would answer, and went her way with joy. Her example teaches us today that the house of God is to be a house of prayer.

The house of God is sanctified by the presence of God.

It is appropriate to pray in the house of God because that is a special place of the presence of God. God is not confined to a particular house, of course, for He is everywhere. But in a very special way, He is present in His house.

Solomon built a beautiful temple in Jerusalem and dedicated it to the worship of God. He recognized that a primary ministry in that temple would be the ministry of prayer. First Kings 8:22-53 recounts Solomon's dedicatory prayer in which He besought God to hear and answer prayer made in that place. It is a beautiful prayer of dedication and commitment, not only of the place but of the people who would worship in that place.

God responded to Solomon's prayer with this promise: "*I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually*" I Kings 9:3. Then the glory of the Lord filled the temple as the sign of the personal presence of

God there.

I say again, God is every where. He cannot be limited to one house, however beautiful and sacred it may be. But God is manifest in a special way in the place which is dedicated by His people for worship, study, and prayer. Your place of meeting with God and His people is a special place of His presence.

The house of God is the place of prayer for all needs.

What are the proper subjects of prayer when one prays in the house of God? One may feel free to pray about any matter of concern in his life.

Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple indicates typical subjects for prayer in the house of God I Kings 8:22-53. One can pray about his sins against his fellow verses 31,21, defeat before his enemy verses 33,34; drought upon the land verses 35, 36; pestilence by disease or insects verse 37; spiritual problems verses 38-40; distress caused by the discipline of God verses 42-44. Even the foreigner can come into the house of God, pray, and be heard of God verses 41-43. Solomon concluded his prayer with the supplication that God's eyes may be open to His people "*to hearken unto them in all that they call for unto thee*" I Kings 9:52. Every need was considered a proper subject for prayer in the house of God.

The test of the Biblical revelation, including the New Testament teachings, agree with that testimony. The Christian can pray for "*what things soever ye desire*" with the assurance that God will answer Mark 11:24. Jesus said to "*ask what ye will*" and it will be done John 4:1-3. But the Bible does not mean that one can ask for sinful and wrong things and receive from God. There are limitations set concerning those things James 4:1-3. But the Bible does teach that all things good and proper and needful are subjects which a Christian may present to God in prayer and receive a hearing before Him.

Hannah prayed about her desire to bear a child. She asked God to break her barrenness by giving her a son. She asked and received. She was so certain that her conception and the birth of her son was the answer to her prayer that she named him "Samuel," which in her language was a term meaning "Asked (requested) of God." She testified, "*For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me the petition which I asked of him*" I Sam. 1:27.

The house of God is the church where you meet with the people of God.

As the house of God in Bible times was declared to be a house of prayer, so your church meeting place should be primarily a place of prayer. You can pray elsewhere, and you should pray elsewhere, but there can be a special blessing of having prayer in the house of prayer.

Come to church and pray. Pray before a worship service begins. Pray as you sing, study, or listen to preaching. Pray after the service has ended. (I can imagine the delight of a pastor whose people want to remain and pray after a service has been dismissed!) Come to the church building on weekdays for the purpose of prayer. Make your church meeting a special place of prayer.

I say again, you do not have to be at the church house to pray, but you will find that to be a special place for special prayer.

"Father, make us a people of prayer. Teach us the benefits of praying in early morning, at noon, and in the evenings. Teach us to pray in the privacy of our homes. But grant that we will never lose the hold joy of making your house a special house of prayer for ourselves and our families. For Jesus' sake. Amen."

PRAY WITH A FERVENT SPIRIT

May God deliver us from the curse of lethargy in prayer. Nothing saps the vitality of one's prayer life like the sin of half-heartedness.

The depth of one's spiritual commitment, the extent of his concern for spiritual things, and the consistency of his prayer life are indicated by the way he prays. True commitment, honest concern and consistent practice are indicated by the fervency in petition.

We are earnest about things which truly concern us. I remember a mother whose son had forsaken his home and religious training for a life in the excesses of sin. His mother prayed for him and requested Christian friends to pray for him. One day a friend advised, "Why don't you give him up? Why do you keep on praying for him?" She replied, "I cannot give him up. He is my son." That is the spirit of one who prays fervently.

The Bible commands us to pray fervently.

Lukewarmness is ever condemned in the Bible, but fervency is respected. Hear this word from God through His prophet Jeremiah. *"For I know the thought that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart"* Jer. 29:11-13.

Review those words of Jeremiah. God wants the best for His people, so He thinks "thoughts of peace" toward them. God plans to give the best of His people even "to give you an expected end." God hears the prayers of His people when they make an effort to call upon Him. God meets personally with His people when they are earnest in seeking Him, searching "with all your heart."

Jesus sent a solemn word to the congregation of Christians in Laodicea. He said, in part, *"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth"* Rev. 3:15, 16. What did he mean?

Jesus was warning against the plague of spiritual sloth. If to be "hot" means to be zealous in religious commitment, to be "cold" means to be devoid of religious commitment, to be "lukewarm" means to be so indecisive that one is not for or against God nor Satan. Such a spirit is disgusting to the Lord.

Take care that you cultivate that devotion to God which makes you sincere in your commitment and fervent in your prayers. God commands it.

Jesus gave an example of fervent prayer.

Jesus was preeminently a Man of prayer. He prayed in early morning hours, during the day, and late at night. He prayed before meals. He prayed before great decisions. He prayed publicly and privately. He was such a Man of prayer His disciples came to Him with the request. "Lord, teach us to pray" Luke 11:1.

Jesus knew how to pray aright. One day in public prayer He said, *"Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me, but I say this for the sake of those standing here, that they might know that you have sent me"* John 11:41. Imagine being able to pray with assurance that God hears every prayer you pray! Jesus did.

And yet, there were times when Jesus prayed more fervently than at other times. Luke 22 recounts the happenings in the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed just before His arrest the night preceding His crucifixion. Verses 40-44 read, *“And when he was at the place, he said unto them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me, nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”*

There can be no question concerning the meaning of the text. The term “more earnestly” means “more intently, more strenuously, more fervently, with greater earnestness.” Yes, there were times when Jesus prayed more fervently.

You and I cannot improve upon the prayer life of Jesus. It is best that we imitate Him instead. There are times in our prayers, as in His, when we enjoy the privilege of fellowship with God. Those are the times when we do not ask for anything in particular, but “just love Him a little” in prayer. But there are other times when prayer is work. We wrestle and strive. We exert great energy and are heavy in heart. It is on those occasions that we, like Jesus, pray “more earnestly” than in normal prayer. There is no reason to be dismay at the times of special urgency in prayer. We are but following the example of our Lord.

Hannah set an example of fervent Prayer.

Look back to First Samuel, chapter one, to that “Example of a Praying Mother.” Hannah’s heart was heavy because she had no child. She came before the Lord to petition for a son to be born to her and her husband. She was *“in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore...Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard”* I Sam. 1:10, 13. Eli the high priest saw her and misunderstood what was happening. It was the custom for people to lift their hands to God and pray out loud. When Hannah wept and moved her lips without speaking, Eli thought she was drunk. He rebuked her for coming thus before the Lord. She replied, *“No, nor strong drunk, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto”* I Sam. 1: 15,16.

How might we characterize Hannah’s prayer? It was a prayer filled with passionate desire. She wanted a son more than anything in the world. It was a prayer marked by importunity. God alone could give her the strength to conceive and bear a son. It was a prayer aimed to the glory of God. She vowed to dedicate her son to the Lord. It was a prayer of faith and resignation. She believed God would do what she asked, and so grieved over it no more. Hannah’s prayer is a good example for our praying today.

Oh that parents would pray for their children with the earnestness of Hannah. She prayed for her child before he was born. She prayed for her child as he grew. She prayed for her child as he served as a prophet of God. Through all of her life, her prayers were involved with the birth, life, and ministry of her son. What an example for parents to follow.

Let us learn to pray fervently. Passion on our part is no deed of merit which obligates God to answer our petitions. It is a sign of earnestness and an expression of faith. It is appropriate for one who is deeply moved concerning a particular need. It is Biblical in both principle and practice. The example of Hannah, a praying mother, teaches us to pray fervently.

“Father, deliver us from the curse of a half-hearted prayer life. Let us realize the truth of the Scripture which says that the heartfelt supplication of a righteous man can bring powerful results James 5:16. Minister in our lives that we can never be content with lukewarm concern in

our prayer
life. For Jesus' sake. Amen.”

PRAY IN CONFIDENT FAITH

Faith is essential to answered prayer. God's promise to answer prayer is accompanied with this admonition: *“Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways”* James 1:6-8. Behold, the imperative of faith as one seeks for answered prayer.

In this series of studies, we are examining the prayer life of a faithful woman in the Old Testament. Her name was Hannah. She was the wife of a religious man whose name was Elkanah. They were of the tribe of Ephraim and lived in Palestine during the times of the Judges. Hannah was unable to bear a child. That was a grief to her heart and the subject of her prayers. In the record of her seeking God and receiving an answer to her prayers, we can find principles to help in living for God today. The full story may be read in First Samuel, chapters one and two.

Hannah teaches us to pray in faith. She poured out her soul before God in prayer at the house of God. She shared her burden with the man of God whose privilege it was to minister to the people of God. He encouraged her with the words, *“Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him”* I Sam. 1:17. That word of encouragement inspired her faith. She accepted in advance, without tangible proof, that God would answer her prayer. She teaches us to pray and trust God with the answer.

The nature of the prayer of faith.

Faith is the response of the human spirit to the faithfulness of God. It involves the totality of the personality --mind, emotion, and will.

In the realm of the mind, true faith says, “I believe God can do what I ask of Him.” Its emphasis is on the inmost desires of the heart. It clarifies and purifies the motives in asking. It considers the petitioner in the light of the petition.

In the realm of the will, true faith says, “I know God is doing what I ask of Him.” It looks toward the realization of the thing requested. It accepts beforehand the gift of God in answer to prayer. It finds relief from distress and anticipates with joy the thing that is yet to be realized.

The illustration of the three aspects of true faith is manifest in the experience of Hannah. She believed God could give her a child, so she asked Him to do so. She yearned for God to give her a child, so she presented her prayer with tears. She accepted the promise that God would give her a child, so she went her way without worry any further. Her faith was honored by the birth of her special son.

Your faith will be real when it encompasses the totality of your personality--mind, emotion, and will.

The desperation of faith.

Thank God for those occasions when we are shut up to Him alone. Thank God for the times when there is none other to help. It is when one is shut up to God alone that he discovers God alone is sufficient.

Such was the case with Hannah. She and her husband desired to have children, but she remained barren. Time passed but her barrenness remained. They exhausted all their known resources, but she bore no child. Hannah turned to God with earnest petition; she knew only He could help.

I remember that occasion when at least four nations joined armies to invade Judah and fight against King Jehoshaphat. All the leaders of Judah gathered themselves together, to ask help of the Lord. Jehoshaphat prayed to God, *“We have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee”* II Chron. 20:12. What a blessed thing developed. God sent them into battle with a choir of singers in front. They marched and sang praises to the Lord. By the time they arrived at the field of the battle, the Lord had already given them the victory. The invaders had fought each other until they were all dead. The salvation of the Lord was shown to Judah in response of prayer and upon the occasion of her faith. Read the full account in II Chron. 20:1-30.

“The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” II Chron. 16:9. *The believing people of God can say, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth”* Psa. 121:1,2.

The commitment of faith.

It is appropriate, but not necessary, for a vow to accompany petition to God. Hannah vowed a vow, and said, *“O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon this head”* I Sam. 1:11. God heard her prayer and gave her the son she desired. Afterwards, she dedicated to serve God in the tabernacle, saying, *“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; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord”* I Sam. 1:27, 28. That is an excellent example of the commitment of faith.

A vow in relation to prayer is not a bribe to entice God to answer. It is not required of God. It is appropriate on occasion, however, as an expression of the petitioner’s purpose in asking for a certain thing.

Why should God answer your prayer for a particular thing? What would you do if you received it? A vow is a way to pledge yourself to a certain course of action. It is for man’s sake, not for God’s sake, that vows are made in prayer.

The assurance of faith

The assurance of faith is based on the belief that God has heard with favor the petition that has been presented before Him. It is the testimony of the Holy Spirit that the prayer is accepted and the blessing is on its way. Assurance enables one to accept the yet-unseen blessing as if it were already present.

Assurance of faith enables a person to leave the burden which one has borne. Hannah sought the Lord with tears, received assurance, and *“her countenance was no more sad”* I Sam. 1:18. You can experience the same blessing when you pray in faith.

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” I John 5:14, 15.

“Father, forgive us for our stumblings in doubt. We would not question you, nor your power, nor your willingness to answer prayer. We question whether we are able to pray aright. Help us turn our eyes from ourselves, centering them wholly on you and your faithfulness, that we may experience the blessings of prayer in faith. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.”

PRAY AND PERFORM YOUR VOWS

Would any person dare to lie to God? Yes, some people would. In fact, I have witnessed instances where otherwise honest people have lied to almighty God. I speak of those occasions when a person, perhaps under the pressure of a distressing situation, made promises (vows) to God which he did not keep. It is a terrible sin to lie to God.

I call to mind a certain man to whom I ministered through a critical illness. He had been careless about the quality of his spiritual life and witness while he was healthy. On the sickbed for many days, he had ample opportunity to reflect on his life and to evaluate his course of life. He told me how he had confessed to God as sin his negligence. He and I prayed together, at his request, and pledged his life to the service of God. He recovered full health and strength after an extended period of convalescence. By the time he was well and strong, he seemed to have forgotten his solemn vows. He returned to the same lifestyle he had followed before he became ill. I would say that man had dared to lie to almighty God. What a monstrous sin!

Vows are not necessary to answered prayer.

Turn back in your mind to the record of First Samuel, chapter one. Hannah, the barren wife of Elkanah, offered a vow to God. She promised God that if He would enable her to conceive and to bear a son, she would dedicate that child to God for all his lifetime that he might serve God. God heard and answered her prayer by the birth of a son. She was so committed to the vow she had made, and so aware that the child was born as a direct answer to prayer, that she named him Samuel (which means “Asked of God”). Every time she called his name she was reminded that he was hers in answer to prayer and that she had pledged to give him to the service of God.

God answered Hannah’s prayer. He did not answer her prayer because she made a vow, but because He was gracious and merciful. Vows are not necessary to answered prayer. God does not vow, nor has He ever, required them.

I emphasize this truth for a very obvious reason. I have heard people make rash promises to God in an effort to persuade Him to answer prayer. (I remember a father who promised to give God every dollar he earned for the rest of his life if God would heal his daughter.) Such rash promises indicate a lack of confidence in God as a loving Father who delights to meet the needs of His people. Take care about the vows you make in relation to prayer.

Vows are permissible, but they are not mandatory. God will answer prayer whether you make a vow or not.

Vows must be fulfilled after they are made.

The Bible is quite specific at that point. *“When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better it is that thou shouldest now vow, than thou shouldest vow and not pay”* Eccl. 5:4, 5.

Hannah's blessing of the birth of her long-awaited son was accompanied by vows. She vowed in her heart when she asked God to enable her to conceive. She vowed in her home when the child was born. She vowed in the tabernacle when she presented him for the service of God. She vowed and performed her vows to the Glory of God.

Do you suppose that it was easy for Hannah to give up her little son? She had waited so long for him to be born. She had prayed so earnestly for the child to be a boy. She had found in him the fulfillment of the joys of motherhood. Yet, she had dedicated him to the service of God at the tabernacle in Shiloh. Shiloh was a great distance from her home in the inheritance of Ephraim. She could see him only once each year as the family went to Shiloh to offer the yearly sacrifice I Sam. 2:19. On those visits, she took him a coat which she had made with her own hands. No, it was not easy for Hannah to give up her little son, yet she had vowed and did not break that which she had promised God.

On the other hand, it was Hannah's delight that her son was serving God in the tabernacle. How many other women were so honored? What a privilege was hers! She presented the lad to Eli and prayed, saying, "*My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation*" I Sam. 2:1.

Hannah did not lose her son when she gave him to God. He was not the less her own because He was God's servant. In fact, he was the more truly her son as he was the more faithfully God's servant.

The child ministered before the Lord. God blessed Hannah and Elkanah with other children--three sons and two daughters--as a special reward for their willingness to dedicate their firstborn son to Him. The child Samuel ministered before the Lord as he grew to adolescence. It was then that God gave Hannah the greatest blessing of all. God selected young Samuel out of all the men of Israel, to be the prophet of God for his generation. "*And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. All Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh: for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord*" I Sam. 3:19-21.

What a privilege to be the parent of a child chosen to be the messenger and servant of God. How glad Hannah and Elkanah must have been. Let every parent learn that lesson well, and dedicate their children to God.

Prayer had potential even when it is not accompanied by vows.

God so delights to hear and answer prayer that the psalmist called Him by the title "*O Thou who hearest prayer*" Psa. 65:2. How good of God to respond to the requests of His dear children by giving that which they ask of Him. Behold the miracle of answered prayer!

One of our grand old Christian hymns reads, "O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry every thing to God in prayer." It is true, as the Bible has said, "*Ye have not, because ye ask not*" James 4:2.

What if Hannah had not prayed? What if she had not believed God and received His answer to prayer in the person of her firstborn son? How much would have been lost. She would have lost the blessing of seeing answer to prayer. She would have lost the joy of having a son in the service of God. Her nation would have lost the ministry of the prophet through whom God gave his word. All generations would have missed the message of God given through Samuel and the blessing of the record of God's response to petition in His faithful

answers. Thank God, Hannah prayed. Thank God, through Hannah you and I are taught to be people of prayer.

Look back at the journey we have made in these five studies. We have learned, through the “Example of a Praying Mother,” these truths. Pray about your problems. Pray in the house of God. Pray fervently. Pray in faith. Pray and perform your promises to God. Having learned those lessons, let us put them into practice in a life of prayer.

“Father, help us to live in the light of what we have learned in these studies. Make us a people of prayer. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.”