

There's a lot going on in this passage, so let's re-cap. Hannah is "crushed in spirit" (v.10). Life has crushed her. She is depressed; she cries and won't eat. Life went from bad to worse. The story of Hannah begins with her failed dreams. She wants a child, but she hasn't been able to conceive. In this culture, having children, especially a son, is a woman's purpose. She is considered a valued member of society if she is able to give her husband children. So, Hannah is deeply distressed that she isn't able to live out her purpose.

To make things worse, her rival sister wife bullies her about it. Hannah already feels worthless, and then Penninah rubs it in her face, even at Worship. Every time Hannah goes "to the house of the Lord" (v.7), a time for prayer and sacrifice, she is tormented. And, this goes on for years (v.7).

Her husband doesn't really understand why she is a hot mess. He loves her more than Penninah, so why can't that be enough to make her happy? Why can't he be enough for her? He doesn't get it. Elkanah may be trying to be supportive and genuinely sympathetic to Hannah, but as any woman who has been in a similar situation will tell you, Elkanah is invalidating her feelings, trying to solve the problem for her, and then making it all about him. So, now she has to nurse his ego on top of everything else.

Hannah pulls herself together, puts on a brave face, and goes through the motions of their life until she can sneak away to the temple by herself. When she arrives at the temple, she makes a beeline to God. She walks right past the priest on duty, Eli, to get to the source. She knows that what she needs is to pour out her heart to God, and that's exactly what she does. She begins praying, and all the pent-up pain and sadness is finally released.

During her prayer, she "makes a vow" (v.11), or in other words, she bargains

with God: If you give me a son, I'll dedicate him to your service. If you'll end my pain and suffering, I'll give him back to you. She prays so fervently, that her lips are moving even though she is praying silently.

And, then, she has to deal with another man's ego. Eli was put off that Hannah bypassed him when she came into the temple. He watched her praying and accused her of being drunk. When she explained that he misinterpreted her actions, he gave her a blessing, as if to save face.

Hannah did leave the temple lighter. Her sadness had been released, and she was able to get back to her life again. And, we see, at the end of the passage, that God did answer her prayer. I think it's important to note, though, that she was transformed before her prayer was answered.

So, what helped Hannah? What transformed her sadness into joy? What caused her tear-stained cheeks to become "a face radiant," (v.18) as *The Message* described. Did her bargaining work? Was it the priest's blessing? Let's see what we can learn from Hannah and the nature of God.

First of all, Hannah had **confidence** in God. All the people around her continued to let her down. She was bullied, invalidated, misinterpreted, and falsely accused by people around her who could've -- and should've -- encouraged her. They could've helped her, yet they all made her problems worse. But, Hannah doesn't let anyone stop her from praying. She knew in her heart that God was the only one who could help her. Hannah shows confidence in God's ability to alter her situation, and she makes her petitions with hope.

Her **perseverance** pays off. Scripture tells us that this went on for years, but Hannah never gives up. She does what she has to do to get through it, whether that is to "suck it up, buttercup" or "keep on, keeping on" until she finally has the opportunity to be alone with God. She

suffers until the moment arrives when she is able to be real with the one person who gets her, who loves her unconditionally, and lets her feel whatever she is feeling. Not the passage of years, nor the ridicule of Peninnah, nor the pity of Elkanah nor the misunderstanding of Eli stops Hannah's appeal to God.

Hannah's **patience** and **determination** are signs of her **devotion**. She endured Peninnah's cruelty every time she went to Shiloh, but she kept going. How many of us have stopped going to church because someone was rude or hurt our feelings there? Hannah doesn't let this happen. She is determined to keep going and get her alone time with God in the temple. The Ark of the Covenant was in this temple at Shiloh during this time, so it was believed that the actual presence of God was in this temple. She has to do whatever it takes to get into the presence of God.

When she does get to pour out her heart to God, she devotes her son to God's service for his whole life, if God will grant her petition. When someone vowed to be a Nazirite, it was usually for a specified amount of time. As a sign of devotion, Hannah promised his whole life.

We see that God has mercy on Hannah and answers her prayer. God relieves her pain and suffering and gives her a gift of love. It wasn't her bargaining or Eli's blessing that gave her Samuel. We know that, because our own bargaining and blessings don't always work for us when we're crushed in spirit.

God's true nature is revealed when God shows mercy to a heartbroken woman who had no other hope. And, this gift of love of Samuel was not only for Hannah. It was for all of Israel. Samuel becomes the prophetic leader who leads them through times of great difficulty, as they transition from a tribal culture to a monarchy.

Hannah doesn't go back on her promise to devote a son to a lifetime of service. In fact, she gives Samuel to the same priest, Eli, who was at the temple when she made her vow. Samuel spent his life serving God and was known for his obedience to God.

God hears Hannah's cries. God wipes her tears and gives her hope. God is a loving, merciful God who hears our cries when we are crushed in spirit. Just in the last couple of weeks, we have had a lot to cause us great distress. Whether it is with the most recent mass shooting, the wildfires, or when our bodies fail us like Hannah's. Life crushes us all from time to time.

But, we have hope. People of God, we have a loving, merciful God who hears our prayers. Pour out your pain and suffering to God. Notice that Hannah's countenance changed after she entered the divine's presence and brought her distress to God. It wasn't the answered prayer that transformed her. It was releasing all the pain and suffering to God. It was then, that she could carry on.

Listening and Merciful God, we come to you in your presence and pour out our distress to you. You are the only one who can help us. We have tried going to others, but they have just compounded the problem. They don't understand us like you do. Sometimes, God, we feel that we can't take it one more day. We want to have the patience, confidence, perseverance, and devotion that Hannah had, but sometimes the days are really, really long. And, each day, a new problem arises. We release our pain and anxiety to you. Lord, we are in your mercy. Relieve our suffering and enable us to carry on. Amen.