

Walking in Prayer: Old Testament

Lesson 5: Prayers of Gideon and Hannah

Vocabulary:

to accomplish	hardship	confidence	priest
vow (n.)	to face (something)	soldiers	to be drunk
tribe	task	to refuse	to pour out (one's heart)
mighty	to be pleased with	incomplete	to give birth
warrior	proof	disgrace	to intend (to do something)
describe	murderer	to mock	to wean
oppression	military troop	fulfilled/unfulfilled	to brag (n. bragging)
wonder (n.)	surrounding area	community	bow (n.)
ancestor	to gather	loneliness	perfection
to abandon	wheat	to weep (n. weeping)	dust
label (n.)	to process (wheat/food)	misery	to give your heart (to something)
insecure	dew	razor	

Discussion:

In Lesson 4, we learned from Joshua that when we have dreams for God, and not just dreams for ourselves, God answers our prayers and moves through us to **accomplish** his plans for our lives and for our world. We learned that hidden sin can also stop God's plans for our lives, so it is important to confess our sins and turn away from them.

Share one way that your life or relationship with God was impacted from the last lesson. In what ways do you still want to grow?

In this study, we will look at the life and prayers of Gideon and Hannah to see how God uses our weaknesses to accomplish his great plans. We will also explore the roles of signs and **vows** when praying to the Lord.

The Prayer of Gideon (Judges 6-8)

The man Gideon appears in the book of Judges as the son of Joash, the Abiezrite, during the time when judges instead of kings ruled Israel. Gideon belonged to the weakest **tribe** of Manasseh, who were descendants of Joseph. Gideon confessed to be the weakest man in his tribe. Yet, God speaks to Gideon through an angel, telling Gideon that the Lord is with him and calling him a **mighty warrior**. Yet Gideon doubts that God is with him, and he questions this new and powerful identity as a mighty warrior. The Israelites had been living under the **oppression** of the neighboring Midianites for seven years, so how could this be true? To the Lord, Gideon replies, "Pardon me, my lord...but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his **wonders** that our **ancestors** told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has **abandoned** us and *given us to the hands of Midian*" (6:13, NIV).

*To give someone into the hands of an enemy means to lead the people into defeat.

Even though Gideon identifies himself as the weakest man in the tribe, God identifies him as a mighty warrior. When you think about your life and your identity, what **labels** do you give yourself? Explain.

In this season of your life, in what ways do you feel strong? In what ways do you feel weak?

Examine Gideon's prayer. What do you notice? What does he say?

In this season, Gideon feels weak and **insecure** about himself and about the people in his life. Gideon is discouraged about the **hardship** and oppression the Israelites are **facing**. In his mind, he is the weakest man in his tribe. While he is respectful toward God, he feels completely abandoned by him. But things are about to change, and the Lord encourages Gideon with these words: "Go in the strength that you have and save Israel out of Midian's hands. Am I not sending you?" (6:14).

Take a minute to consider your life. Have you ever felt that the Lord is sending you to a special **task** or job, to help a person, or to serve a certain type of people? Perhaps you feel underqualified. Explain.

Did you ever hear the Lord *speak* to you about this assignment? Explain.

How do you feel about the task God is asking you to do?

Even though Gideon can hear the voice speaking to him, he wants to be sure that the voice he is hearing is the voice of the Lord. So, he asks the Lord for a sign: "If you are really **pleased with** me, then give me a sign as **proof** that it is really you speaking with me" (6:17). Upon asking something from God, Gideon immediately prepares a goat and bread as sacrifices and presents them to the Lord. At that moment, the Lord sends fire to burn up the sacrifices as a sign to Gideon. When Gideon sees this miracle, he builds an altar to God and calls it the *Lord of Peace*. The Lord then commands Gideon to destroy his father's altar to a god named Baal and to build another altar to the Lord for sacrificing a bull. Gideon obeys the Lord, even though he is fearful of the town's response.

What things do you notice about Gideon's relationship with God?

While Gideon is spending time with God, worshipping, seeking God's direction, and obeying all that God asks him to do, **military troops** from **surrounding areas** **gather** near the Jordan River to attack the Israelites. Gideon then gathers his people and others from surrounding areas to defend their land, yet still he is afraid. He asks the Lord once again for a sign so that he will know without doubt that the Lord is with him. He places a piece of cloth on the floor where the **wheat** is **processed** and asks the Lord to fill the cloth with morning **dew** as a sign that the Lord is truly with him in battle. The next morning, the cloth is soaked with water! Still Gideon doubts and asks for a second sign: for God to make the cloth dry in the morning. God does just as Gideon has prayed and even makes the ground surrounding the cloth wet with dew!

Consider what God is asking Gideon to do. Why do you think Gideon asks for another sign?

Why do you think God is willing to give Gideon this sign to confirm his direction to lead his people into battle?

Have you ever asked God for a sign? If yes, did the Lord give it to you? Explain the situation.

If you feel God is sending you into a situation now, do you want God to confirm your direction with a sign? If yes, what sign would you want God to give you? Consider Gideon's examples and be specific.

God answers Gideon's prayers and strengthens him with **confidence** to face such a dangerous situation. But God doesn't make the task easy. Out of the 20,000 men that Gideon has for the battle, the Lord removes nearly all of them, leaving Gideon with only 300 men. God knows that Gideon is insecure, and he knows that Gideon needs courage. Yet, God sees Gideon's faithfulness and obedience, and for these reasons, God is more than willing to encourage Gideon and give him strength. The Lord sees Gideon's fear and says to him, "If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp [of Midian]...and listen to what they are saying. Afterward you will be encouraged to attack the camp" (7:10-11). Gideon goes to the Midian camp and hears a man telling his dream to another man: that the Israelite leader Gideon has conquered the Midianites! At this, Gideon worships the Lord and knows that he will be victorious.

With three hundred men and the help of the Lord, Gideon defeats 135,000 enemy **soldiers** (8:10-12). The people ask Gideon to become their ruler because of the victory. But Gideon **refuses** and replies, "The Lord will rule over you" (23). As a reward, the Lord gives the Israelites forty years of peace because of Gideon's faithfulness (28).

What else do we see about Gideon's heart and relationship with God? How are Gideon's motives similar to Joshua's?

What can you learn from Gideon's walk with God?

The Prayer of Hannah (I Samuel 1-2)

During the final period when judges are ruling Israel, we meet a woman named Hannah. She is the wife of Elkanah, a man from the tribe of Ephraim, son of Joshua. Elkanah is a righteous man who makes regular sacrifices to the Lord at the temple. Elkanah has two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah has children, but Hannah has none. Because Hannah has no children, she feels **incomplete** as a woman and experiences **disgrace** in her Jewish community. To make her situation worse, Peninnah **mocks** and **insults** Hannah, causing her to feel **bitterness** in her spirit. Her husband Elkanah does not understand his wife's emotional need to be a mother, leaving Hannah in deeper distress.

Are you experiencing something similar to Hannah right now – a **unfulfilled** dream, an unanswered prayer, rejection from your friends or **community**, **loneliness** in a time of suffering? Perhaps you have a deep desire for something that has not happened yet. Explain.

When the time comes for Elkanah and his wives to travel to the temple to make sacrifices to the Lord, Hannah stands in the temple **weeping** in all her bitterness, praying, and vowing to the Lord:

¹¹ “Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s **misery** and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no **razor** will ever be used on his head¹.” (1:11, NIV)

What do you notice about Hannah’s prayer? What kind of vow does she make?

Vows to God are very serious, but in some situations, they are a necessary part of God’s plan. In your situation or need, have you considered making a vow to God? Discuss the types of vows you might make. You are not making a vow right now, but simply considering whether a vow could be a part of God’s plan for your situation.

The **priest** of the temple, Eli, sees Hannah and her mouth moving while she continues to pray silently in the temple. At that time, Hannah and her family have just finished eating and drinking, so Eli assumes that she is **drunk** from wine! Hannah did not have any wine with her meal and tells Eli that she is **pouring out her heart** to God in pain and grief. Eli encourages Hannah and blesses her saying, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel [give] you what you have asked of him” (1:17). After Hannah and Elkanah return home and some time has passed, Hannah **gives birth** to a son, whom she calls Samuel, a name that in Hebrew will always remind her that God answered her prayer.

The Bible teaches that we should never make a vow we do not **intend to** keep². Yet, Hannah is faithful to the vow she made to the Lord. After she **weans** Samuel, she dedicates him to the service of the Lord at the temple, miles away from his home, where Samuel lives all the days of his life. The moment Hannah gives her son to the temple, she does not weep or cry. Rather, she prays this prayer:

¹ “My heart is happy in the Lord. I feel very strong in my God. I laugh at my enemies. I am very happy in my victory. ² There is no holy God like the Lord. There is no God but you. There is no Rock like our God. ³ Don’t continue **bragging**. Don’t speak proud words because the Lord God knows everything. He leads and judges people. ⁴ The **bows** of strong soldiers break, and weak people become strong. ⁵ People who had plenty of food in the past must now work to get food. But those who were hungry in the past now grow fat on food. The woman who was not able to have children now has seven children [“seven” is a symbol for **perfection**]. But the woman who had many children is sad because her children are gone... ⁸ He raises the poor from the **dust**, and he takes away their sadness. He makes them important and seats them with princes and at the places for honored guests. The Lord made the whole world, and the whole world belongs to him.” (2:1-8, ESV)

How does Hannah describe herself before God answered her prayer? How did she act when she was bitter?

How has Hannah’s heart changed? How does she describe God in her prayer?

Like Hannah, how have you felt discouraged or bitter in your situation? Explain.

¹ The phrase “no razor will ever be used on his head,” is a symbolic phrase meaning that Hannah will dedicate her son to become a Nazarite, one devoted to the service of the Lord for a period of time (Numbers 6).

² Ecclesiastes 5:4-6.

Has your situation affected how you see God? Explain.

What can learn from Hannah's prayers?

Hannah kept her vow all the days of her life. Her son Samuel grew up under Eli the priest and became the last judge over the Israelites. Just like his mother Hannah, Samuel served God faithfully all the days of his life.

This Week:

Write in your journal:

1. Spend time with God sharing with him your challenges, weaknesses, and doubts about a situation in your life. Like Gideon and Hannah, be honest with God about how you feel.
2. Consider the tasks that you feel God is asking you to do. Pray about your motives and confess any selfish motives that you feel.
3. If you need signs from the Lord before pursuing this task, tell God in prayer what you desire him to do. While you are waiting for his sign, what steps could you take in your walk with God that would show God that you honor him?
4. Consider Hannah's vow that she made to the Lord. If you wish to make a vow to the Lord, consider it carefully and **give your heart** fully to the vow you make. Write your vow on a card and post it where you will see it regularly.
5. What prayers has God answered for you in the past? Write a prayer of worship and thanksgiving to remind yourself of God's goodness and faithfulness to you.