



Hannah

1 Samuel 1; 2:1-21

Opening Prayer: “God, we thank you for the stories in the Bible of women of faith who were used by you for a particular time. Help us to listen with open hearts and minds to the story of Hannah so that her story may become our story. Amen.”

Hannah Monologue

My name is Hannah. I don't really know what to say. I have beautiful children after living so long believing I would never even have one child. I don't really believe that I was called to a certain time and place for God's purpose, but I most certainly believe that God heard my cries for help and answered my prayers in ways that I could never have imagined.

My husband, Elkanah, could never really understand how I felt. Of course, he had children of his own with Peninnah. I've been quiet most of my life. I'm more of a listener than a talker. One day I had heard enough from Elkanah and Peninnah and, at that moment, I felt like I'd heard enough from God, too. Have you ever been in a place where you just felt so helpless that you figure you have nothing to lose? Well, that is how I felt.

We were at the temple making our annual sacrifices, and I just couldn't even eat because I was sick with grief. I found myself outside praying, asking God to help me to have a baby boy, and the priest, Eli, was sitting there. I hadn't even seen him! I guess I had been pretty distraught in my prayers because the priest actually thought I was drunk! Normally, I would have been so embarrassed, I would have gotten away as fast as I could. I really don't know where my voice came from, but I heard myself telling him that I had been praying for a son and that if God would indeed bless me in this way that I would turn right around and give that son back to the work of God. The priest was so kind. He assured me that I would be blessed by God.

I would love to be able to say that I believed him one hundred percent, but I'd already waited so long. What did happen was really strange, though. A sense of peace came over me like nothing I had ever known before. I knew at that moment that no matter what happened I would be okay, son or no son. So, I went back in and had something to eat!

Well, I already gave the end away. God did bless me with a beautiful baby boy. I named him Samuel which means, “God has heard.” You have to be careful what you ask for, though. I had promised him to God, so when he was still very, very young I took him to Eli and I left him there to learn the work of God. So many years have passed and I still get tears in my eyes when I think about that day I left my baby in the care of someone else. Can you imagine seeing the greatest blessing in your life only once a year? It was heartbreaking at times.

But, as I said God gave me other children to keep me occupied and who bring enormous joy to my life. They really liked to tease Samuel when I would take him his new clothes each year at the time of the sacrifice. I'd do the silly mother thing and make him try them on in front of everyone. He still gives me a hard time for that. He has turned into an amazing man.

Come to think of it, maybe my blessing *by* God was in some way also God *using* me at a particular time in a particular place to accomplish part of God's plan. What greater contribution than giving your children? I never really thought of it that way before.

Discussion Suggestions (Hannah):

Remind the women that our Women's Ministry theme this year is "For Such a Time as This: Reaching Out to Serve." Recall that Hannah stated in the beginning, "I don't really believe that I was called to a certain time and place for God's purpose." Encourage women to discuss: "How do you respond to those words from Hannah? Have you ever doubted with Hannah that God called you to a certain time and place for God's purpose? What may have caused you to feel like that?"

Recall that Hannah asked: "Have you ever been in a place that you just felt so helpless that you had nothing to lose?" Invite each woman to choose a partner sitting near her and talk about a time when she experienced those same feelings. (If a woman does not feel comfortable talking about these feelings, she may silently recall them as she listens to her partner.)

Comment: "Where did Hannah turn when her feelings of hopelessness and emptiness seemed overwhelming? What are some words you would use to describe her praying? What can we learn from Hannah that can help us when we pray?"

Ask: "What did Hannah come to understand about God using her in a particular time and place to accomplish God's plan?" Guide women to brainstorm ways that we can give our children (whether children in our family or those we nurture at church) to God. (You may wish to list the responses on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper.)

Invite the women to join you in a time of guided silent prayer (as you pause between each statement):

"Thank God for the example of Hannah and the way God used her to help accomplish God's plan."

"Bring your needs, whatever they may be, honestly and boldly to God knowing that God hears your prayer and cares for you."

"Talk with God about how you will respond to God's blessing by giving your children or other gifts of God's grace to God to use in accomplishing God's purpose for such a time as this."



Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Luke 1:26-56; 2:1-19, 41-51; John 2:1-11; 19:25-27

Opening Prayer: “God, help us to listen to the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as if we had never heard it before. As we hear how you used Mary for a certain purpose, help us learn how you would use us for your purpose. Amen.”

Mary, the Mother of Jesus Monologue

I have a pretty easy answer for a question about being used at a certain time for a certain purpose. I am Mary, the mother of Jesus. I guess I could stop there. I was used by the Holy Spirit to bring the Messiah into this world. I still don't understand it, but I've learned that I don't have to understand it.

It is quite a story really. When the angel came to me and told me about Jesus, I was terrified. I was so young, so immature, so not married! Joseph was a wonderful man, but I could never have expected him to stay with me knowing that the child I carried was not his. But, by the grace of God, he did stay with me. He cared so very much for Jesus. I loved watching him teach Jesus carpentry. I could sit for hours watching them work together. To me, it was beautiful.

There were times when Joseph and I were at our wits end with him, though. Now, I can see better what was happening, but at the time he felt like a handful of a boy! I will never forget losing him on our way back from Jerusalem. There were so many of us walking together. I thought he must be with Joseph. Joseph thought he was with me. When we met up again and realized he was with neither of us, we panicked. We knew how special he was. At least, we knew as much as our minds could grasp right then. We were sick with worry and fear. How could we have let something happen to this beautiful and special boy?

We retraced our steps and there he was sitting in the temple engaged in a heated debate with the rabbis. I was furious. All this time I was so worried and he was just sitting there not thinking a thing about it. When he told me that I should have known that he would be in his father's house, I had very mixed emotions. First, I was just more angry. How could he talk to his mother this way? But then, something clicked within me and I began to truly see Jesus for who he really was. I realized that he wasn't ever mine to begin with and, of course, he was right where he was supposed to be. We made it through that day and many other days of not fully understanding his choices.

I think sometimes my mothering him grated on his nerves a bit. But even the mother of the Messiah can sometimes see things that will be good for her son. Take that wedding miracle, for example. His human side had him so afraid. He didn't think he was ready to perform any miracles. Well, I had been watching him his whole life. I knew it was time. He didn't like it, but I pushed him to discover who he really was. And, of course, he performed the miracle and went on from there to do so many others. He has helped so many people.

My heart swelled with pride more and more. It continues to do so. It was never an easy life, this life called to be the mother of Jesus. No, it was never easy. But, oh, how glorious!

Discussion Suggestions (Mary, the Mother of Jesus):

Comment: “We may have favorite mental pictures of Mary, the mother of Jesus. After hearing her story in her own words, you may now have some new pictures of Mary. I wonder what you learned about Mary through her story that you had not thought about before.” Invite women to share new insights about Mary and God’s calling her to be used by God in a particular way as the mother of Jesus.

Suggest: “Let’s compare Mary’s experience in following God’s will to our own experiences in answering God’s call to a particular time and purpose. In what ways are our experiences like Mary’s?” As women share their ideas and as you pick up on new insights they learned about Mary, you may also want to guide them to explore the following ideas:

When may you have felt afraid and unready to respond to God’s call?

When may you have felt that you did not understand why God was calling you or what God was calling you to do?

How has responding faithfully to God’s call helped you to see Jesus for who he really is?

In what ways would you agree with Mary that answering God’s call may not always be easy, but it is glorious?

Say: “As we listened to Mary’s story, we found her growing in her understanding of God’s purpose for her life and for Jesus’ life. Let’s talk about how we can use each of the following avenues to grow in our understanding of God’s purpose to use us for such a time as ours.” (You may want to lead the whole group in discussion or assign each topic to a small group to discuss and then share with the whole group.)

Bible study

Prayer

Worship

Time spent with other believers

Serving others

Use Mary’s prayer and response to the angel’s announcement for a time of guided prayer. Invite women to listen to a part of Mary’s prayer and then silently voice their corresponding prayer. (Pause between each of Mary’s statements to give women time to pray.)

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

For he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed.

For the Mighty One has done great things for me and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.” (Luke 1:46-50)

“Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” (Lk 1:18)



Woman with Hemorrhage

Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48; Matthew 9:20-22

Opening Prayer: “God, help us listen for your voice as we listen to this monologue. Help us to hear you speak a personal word to us through her words about you calling her to a certain time and place for your purpose. Amen.”

Woman with Hemorrhage Monologue

They call me the hemorrhaging woman which is so funny to me now because, of course, it just isn't true anymore. Was I called to a certain time and place for God's purpose? I'm beginning to wonder.

What I know most about in this world is loss, desperation, and restoration. Talk about desperate! I had been bleeding for twelve years - twelve long years. In those twelve years, I not only lost a lot of blood, but I lost everything. Because of the purity laws I was forced into seclusion. No one wanted to be near me. They were sure that I had done something horrible to have deserved such an affliction from God. To be completely honest, I had been asking God for quite some time what I had done to deserve it. More like yelling at God about it, I guess.

I not only lost my family and friends, but I spent all of my money on doctors who did me no good at all. In fact, they seemed to just take my money and make things worse. Some days I didn't mind though. They were just about the only other people I ever had the opportunity to talk to.

I do have to give credit to one of them, though - the last one I saw. He told me the most amazing stories about this man named Jesus. The doctor had seen Jesus heal a blind man. He told me that he believed this Healer was the long-awaited Messiah. And, he told me where I could find him.

I shouldn't have been in that crowd. If I had been recognized I could have suffered even greater isolation - or worse. But at a moment of complete desperation the consequences are of little concern. All I could think about was that if this Jesus was truly the Messiah, then I knew he was the one person who could help me.

I shouldn't have touched him without his permission, but again, I wasn't thinking too much about the rules. I thought if I could slip into the crowd and just touch his clothes, well, I just knew that even touching the *clothes* of the Messiah would be enough to heal me. I didn't want to bother him. I was just going to slip through, touch him, and slip out again.

Maybe you will find this hard to believe, but as soon as I touched him – as soon as I touched him – I felt different. The blood dried up, and I knew I had truly been healed by the Messiah himself.

That was amazing enough, but then he turned around and asked who touched him. There was a huge crowd! Everyone was touching him. How did he know? But, somehow he did know. He knew *my* touch.

Oh, I was terrified, but I knew for certain who he was now, and I knew I had to speak up. I was wishing that I had just asked him first. I was so scared, not knowing what to expect.

Then, I still can't even believe this really happened, Jesus looked me in the eyes and called me, “Daughter.” Have you ever had someone say just exactly what you needed to hear? I can't find a way to make you understand, but I'd been without a family for so long and the Messiah brought me back. He made me family. He called me, “Daughter.” It was the most incredible moment of my life. I only hope that other women will learn that to boldly approach the Messiah is nothing to be ashamed of. It will bring blessings beyond your dreams. Do you understand? He called me, “Daughter.”

Discussion Suggestions (Woman with Hemorrhage):

Invite discussion of the following: “What conditions caused the woman to be isolated from other people? What conditions today may cause women to feel isolated from other people and perhaps from God? Can you recall a time when you felt isolated from others and from God?”

Ask: “What do you think gave the woman the courage and faith to reach out to Jesus? In what ways were her actions a kind of prayer? What were the results of her action prayer? What have been the results when you reached out to Jesus?”

Ask: “What difference did it make to the woman that Jesus called her ‘Daughter?’ How do you think this woman was called to a certain time and place for God’s purpose? How do you imagine she lived out that calling?”

Spend the rest of the time in reflective prayer. Encourage the women to sit comfortably with their eyes closed, to still themselves, and to allow God to speak to them through this prayer experience. Read the following directions, allowing time for all who wish to respond silently and aloud.

“Hear Jesus’ word ‘Daughter’ addressed to you. ‘Daughter.’ Repeat the word ‘Daughter’ silently to yourself several times during a minute of silence.” (After the time of silence signal for all to repeat the word “Daughter” aloud.)

“Hear Jesus’ word ‘Daughter’ again as Jesus’ personal word to you. ‘Daughter.’ Silently and prayerfully consider how Jesus’ calling you ‘Daughter’ touches your life today.” (After a few minutes of silence invite anyone who will to share how Jesus’ word “Daughter” touches her life.)

“Hear Jesus’ word ‘Daughter’ again. ‘Daughter.’ Prayerfully consider whether this is Jesus’ personal invitation to you for such a time as this.” (After a time of silence, invite anyone who wishes to speak her sense of invitation and response to God’s call.)

“Pray silently for Jesus to empower you and others in the group to live as God’s daughters for such a time as this.”



Syrophoenician Woman

Mark 7:24-30

Opening: “Give your imagination free rein and put yourself in the place of the woman whose story you are about to hear. What do you see and hear? What emotions do you feel as she tells her story of being called for God’s purpose?”

Syrophoenician Woman Monologue

I’m that Syrophoenician woman. Maybe you’ve already heard my story. I understand I was the topic of a lot of gossip because of what I did. When I think about ways God has used me for a particular work, I can only think of my daughter. I never understood fully what was wrong with her, but she wasn’t herself. The only way I know to describe it is that she was afflicted by a demon. I could look into her eyes and see that something was really wrong. Those were the saddest days of my life. I wanted so badly to help her and there was nothing that I did that helped her at all.

Until – until I heard that he was at a nearby house trying to rest. Everyone had been talking about him. I heard miraculous stories of healings from all kinds of afflictions.

Well, the part of the gossip that is true is that I’ve never been one to keep quiet much. If I think it, I usually say it. You always know right where you stand with me. I’ve made a lot of people uncomfortable in my day. I’ve never really “stayed in my place,” if you know what I mean.

So, I marched myself right over to the house where he was staying. I know most people would have left him alone, let him rest and get away for a while. But, my daughter had suffered long enough already. Waiting one more day was not an option.

I could tell when I walked in that he was very tired. He had to be. The stories of his sermons and travels and healings were growing every day. I know he needed some time to rest, but I just had to give it a try. I walked right up to him and asked him to heal my sick daughter. I didn’t know what to expect from him. I knew I was taking a big chance by even being there.

Well, his response was not what I had hoped for, but it was what I would have expected from a Jewish man. He told me that “the children” get to eat before “the dogs.” I guess he wanted me to wait, to not expect something to happen immediately, but I wouldn’t give up. I don’t think I was at all what he expected because the first thing that I thought is what flew out of my mouth. “But even the dogs get crumbs under the table.” Ha! That must have shocked him because for the first time he looked into my eyes. But then, the biggest smile came across his face and he said those words I had longed to hear. “Your daughter is well.”

I don’t even remember if I thanked him. I ran straight home and my daughter was back to her old self, a true miracle. I know God could have healed my daughter in some other way, but I do have so much joy in thinking about God using me and my loud mouth to bring healing to her life. To my life too. Those times before were no fun, but that experience transformed all the pain, all the anguish and showed me that God can use each and every one of us. And, that truly is a miracle.

Discussion Suggestions (Syrophenician Woman):

Ask: “As you continue to imagine yourself as the Syrophenician woman, what do you see? What do you hear? How would you describe yourself? What do you consider your greatest need?”

Continue: “As the woman with a deeply troubled daughter, what barriers did you have to overcome to approach Jesus? What factors enabled you to approach Jesus? How did you understand Jesus’ words that the children get to eat before the dogs? How did these words make you feel?”

Ask women to continue to imagine themselves as the woman from the monologue: “What gave you the courage to challenge Jesus’ statement? Can you describe your feelings when Jesus spoke the words, ‘Your daughter is well?’ How would you say that God used you for such a time and place to accomplish God’s purpose? In what ways was this a miracle?”

Ask women to discuss: “In what ways are you like this woman? What barriers may keep you from approaching Jesus? What about your own personality, gifts, talents, and experience enable you to approach Jesus on your behalf or on behalf of others? How can God use your personality, gifts, talents, and experience for such a time as this? How would you consider that a miracle?”

Guide the women to pray in the following way:

“Imagine Jesus standing before you and asking you: ‘(*Your name*), what is your deepest need? What do you need for me to do for you?’” (Give plenty of time for silent reflection and prayer.)

“Identify how you wish to address God in prayer. You may choose Jesus, Loving God, Lord, or some other name for God that has special meaning for you.”

“Combine your name for God with your deepest need in a single short phrase. Sit quietly and repeat the phrase several times until it takes root deep in your heart.”

“Repeat your chosen name for God and your phrase. Then ask God how this prayer relates to God’s using you for God’s purpose in such a time as this.”

“Thank God for hearing your prayer and for the miracle that God is working in your life for such a time as this.”