

Hear Our Prayers

AC ANGLICAN CHURCH OF PAPHOS

Lent Course 2026 Hear Our Prayers

Week 1 HANNAH Personal Prayer

24 February 2026 - Ven Paul A. Carr

This week we examine the prayer life of Hannah and with her reflect on how we can grow in our personal lives of prayer. Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, is struggling to conceive a child. In her pain she goes to the Temple: **1 Samuel 1:9-20**.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you notice about Hannah's life of prayer?
2. Why do you think Eli assumes that Hannah is drunk?
3. What does Hannah teach us about prayer?

Hannah is one of the most likeable characters in the Bible. We easily relate to her vulnerability and fragility. She could not conceive. That's probably why Elkanah took a second wife, Peninnah. And whilst Elkanah goes on loving and caring for Hannah, she feels like a failure. So, Hannah goes to the Temple and she pours out all her pain. At a time when most prayer was corporate and ceremonial, this is intense, heartfelt, and deeply personal. Hannah bares her soul and prays with all her heart for what she wants – a little boy. And promises that, should her wish be granted, she will offer the boy to the Lord.

Her prayer is so profound and intense that Eli, the priest, notices and presumes that she is drunk. He assures her that the Lord will bless her in her request, and so it comes to pass. Hannah gives birth to Samuel, a name that means 'Heard by God.' She offers the child to the Lord in fulfilment of her promise and then turns to him again in prayer, singing one of the most wonderful and joyful songs in the Old Testament, **1 Samuel 2:1-10** *'My heart rejoices in the Lord ...'*

What is striking about Hannah is the profound intensity of her personal prayer. She does not allow her pain to stop her praying, rather it becomes the vehicle for her prayer. Her relationship with the Lord is honest and unguarded. She tells him everything. Which carries us to the praying life of Jesus. That kind of passionate, honest, personal prayer was the very heart of Jesus's life. In the wilderness, forty days alone and isolated, hungry and thirsty, laying everything before his Father, tempted again and again by the devil.

And then as that public ministry came to its conclusion, the intensity of personal prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Hannah and Jesus both show that it is in personal prayer, when we are alone with the Lord, that he can go to work in us. Think what this kind of personal praying does:

1. *Personal prayer is where we are formed by Jesus.* It is in personal prayer that his Spirit deals with our sin, builds up our gifts, helps us to understand the mystery of our salvation through the cross, moulds us into the person he wants us to be. And ultimately it is personal prayer that prepares us for death and for the life of heaven.

2. *Personal prayer is the place where we ask.* Ask you and shall receive Jesus says. It is the place to lay our needs and the needs of the world before the Lord, knowing he will hear and answer—according to his plans and purposes for our lives and his world.

3. *Personal Prayer develops our relationship with God.* All relationships are based on communication. It's a well-known fact that relationships break down because of a lack of communication. But with good communication, a relationship grows and flourishes. And it's this relationship with God for which we are created. And in this relationship, we find the very meaning and purpose of our lives. Prayer should never be considered as a one-way phone call like leaving a message on an answering machine. Prayer allows us to hear God – and it's vital that we listen.

4. *Personal prayer satisfies our Spiritual hunger.* Prayer satisfies that spiritual hunger we all have. It quenches our spiritual thirst. It refreshes our soul. It's one of the spiritual disciplines we need to strengthen our Christian faith (see notes for Lent Course 2025!)

So if personal prayer does so much, why do we find it so hard? We know it matters, but we don't ever quite get round to doing it. Think – what is that stops you praying alone? It may be that we can't find the words, or think we can't. It's easy to assume that prayer has to be elegantly worded and polite in order to work and that if we aren't one of those praying experts who get the words right, we had better not try. Or it may be self-consciousness that stops us praying. I remember thinking along those lines when I first became a Christian. What am I doing, speaking these words to a God I cannot see? Am I any different from a child with an imaginary friend?

Some people think they don't have time to pray, even though it turns out they have plenty of time for all sorts of other stuff. Sometimes sin and guilt stop us praying because we think we have offended God so deeply that he won't listen to us. And often what stops us praying is our pain. We dare hardly name our fears, our dark experiences, our bitter memories before God because they make us feel ashamed or weak or unworthy of God's company. I want to suggest two simple tips to get your personal prayer life up and running.

HONESTY

The first is one we learn from Hannah and Jesus. Quite simply, it's honesty. You don't need posh words or elegant phrases to pray. Remember, Jesus knows you. That is why he has been born and come to share your life. That's why he promises that every hair on your head is numbered. He knows you better than you know yourself, and what he knows he understands and what he understands he loves. So there is no need and no point in holding anything back from Jesus.

In your personal prayer tell him anything and everything in any words you want to use. Like Hannah, voice your pain, express your needs and desires, lay before him your uncertainty and grief. Tell him your sin and seek forgiveness. Share your sense of inadequacy your weakness, your fears. Just say it! Just get it all out, anyhow, as messily as you like. Remember the pharisee and the sinner who go up to pray in Luke 18. The pharisee lays before the Lord his pride and his successes and how amazing he is. The sinner prays, 'Have mercy on me a sinner.' And it is the sinner's prayer that is heard, because he is honest before God.

STRUCTURE

Another tip for developing personal prayer is structure. Because structure creates the spaces where you can be honest. Some people say, 'I pray when I garden' or 'I pray when I drive.' I pray when I walk the dog! Hannah was not gardening or driving when she spoke to the Lord. She was just praying. And whilst I am not saying there is anything wrong with multitasking prayer, there is something very special about time given simply and solely to the Lord.

So, my challenge to you is to bring some structure to your personal prayer. Find a time, a space, a place when you are doing nothing else. How that works will be very different for the parents with four small children compared to the single person or someone who is retired. But the principle is the same. Dedicated time, carved out for God, when all you are going to do is pray. Try and have some routine or pattern. Here are some suggestions.

1. ACTS. *Adoration:* Start with praising God, exclaiming to him all he is and worship him simply because he is God. *Confession:* This allows us to clean ourselves from the inside out. It is in God's nature for us to be free, and he wants to reveal our sins not to shame us, but rather confess it so we can be free. *Thanksgiving:* Once we have confessed our sin, we can express our gratitude to God for being willing to forgive us. *Supplication:* We then can present our requests before God as supplication.

2. You could have a simple threefold shape. First give thanks. Name before the Lord all that is good and is giving you joy. Second confess. Lay before your Lord your sin and your dependence on him. Third, intercede. Like Hannah, ask. Bring to him your needs, the needs of the world and those places where you need his help. And do all those three with honesty.

3. You could pray with the scriptures. That may mean working your way through a book of the Bible, reading slowly, listening to God and praying what he puts on your heart. Or it may mean using a resource such as *Pray as you Go*, *Lectio 365* or the many other discipleship resources that are now so easily available.

4. You could pray the Office of the Church. In the Office, which is easily available online, the church sets out a pattern for prayer at the start and end of the day with psalms and Bible readings. That structure provides plenty of opportunities for personal prayer as you reflect on the scriptures or intercede.

5. You can use your imagination. Some people pray with a Christian work of art or a poem. Some might use the words of a hymn. Some might use a rosary or prayer beads. Some might stop on a walk and pray in the open air. The important thing is dedicated time, given over to God, in which you can be honest in opening your heart before him.

The Christian faith is not a private matter. We need our brothers and sisters in Christ and we would suffocate without companionship in prayer. In fact, chatting to a fellow Christian or a spiritual director and drawing on the wisdom of others is a great way of growing in your own prayer life.

But Jesus says to us in Matthew 6, *‘Whenever you pray go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.’* What the Lord offers us is a personal relationship, a genuine friendship. And that is fed above all by deep, heartfelt and honest prayer – just you and God and no one else.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How would you rate the health of your prayer life?
2. What factors make you find personal prayer difficult or challenging?
3. When and where do you find it easiest to pray?
4. Can you share a time when God has answered your prayer?
5. What things do you find easy to pray about? What things are harder?
6. What stops you being honest in prayer?
7. When do you pray? What is your own routine or structure of prayer?
8. What would help you to develop your life of personal prayer?

Lord Jesus, as you taught your disciples, so teach us to pray. Give us honesty in our confession, ambition in our intercession, eloquence in our praise and humility in our thanksgiving. Help us to trust in the power of prayer, and as we pray, give us renewed joy in the hope of your salvation. For you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit one God for ever and ever. AMEN.



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