

Waiting for an answer



Bible References:

1 Samuel 1:1–20; 2:1–10



Hannah spent years waiting for God to answer her prayer for a child. Crushed by the expectations of others and her own deep longing to become a mother, she continued to pour out her heart to God. In this session we'll explore what it means to wait for God to answer. Although Hannah lived in a very different time and place, her story reminds us that we can continue to trust God and bring our prayers to him, even when we don't understand why we're still waiting.

You will need:

- Paper
- Pens



Beat

Leader's notes:

Ask the group to think of situations where people have to wait. For example:

- waiting for a ride at a theme park
- waiting in A&E
- waiting for concert or football tickets
- waiting for food to arrive
- waiting for exam results

After sharing a few ideas, divide the group into small teams.

Each team should choose one waiting scenario. They have five minutes to invent a game that people could play while they wait. The sillier and more creative the game, the better!

Once the time is up, each team demonstrates their game to the rest of the group.

Ask:

- Which was your favourite waiting game?
- Which game do you think would actually make waiting easier?

Say:

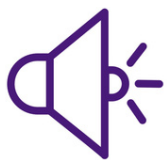
Most of us don't enjoy waiting, especially when something really matters to us. Today's session explores what happens when the thing you're waiting for isn't just delayed by minutes or days, but by years.



Bridge

Leader's notes:

If time allows, then play the group's favourite waiting game together.



Amplify

Say:

Last week we met Daniel, who waited for God to make a move while living in exile. Today we're meeting someone whose waiting was much more personal. Hannah longed for a child and spent years praying that God would answer her prayer. Before we explore Hannah's story in more detail, let's watch a short summary. Just like the last session, the clip we are going to watch is not aimed at your age group but it simplifies Hannah's story and summarises how she waited on God. It also includes the happy ending!

Watch:

Slapstick Theatre (Hannah and God) Saddleback Kids (1:40)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=quVfSeG_1Ts

Say:

In the video, Hannah's story of waiting is told in under two minutes and is simplified for a younger audience. We're going to spend time discussing some of the statements from the video and explore how Hannah must have felt as she waited on God.

Statement One:

Hannah was married to a man named Elkanah but they were not able to have any children.

Read:

¹ There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ² He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

(1 Samuel 1:1-2)

Ask:

- What additional information do we discover in these verses?
- How do you think Hannah felt about Peninnah having children?
- As you place Hannah in her historical context, what social and cultural pressures do you think she experienced?
- How would you expand on the statement, 'Hannah was sad'?

Leader's notes:

If the question of polygamy comes up, the following explanation from the Biblical Theology Study Bible may be helpful:

'Monogamy predominates in the Old Testament, it is God's design for humanity (Genesis 2:18-25). But there are a few instances of men having more than one wife, such as Abraham, Isaac, David, and Solomon. The latter may mostly be explained by political factors such as treaty marriages. Hannah is presumably Elkanah's first wife; because she is barren, Elkanah may have felt it necessary to take a second wife and continue the line of inheritance through her.'

Statement Two:
'It's OK'.

Say:

In the clip Elkanah says, 'It's OK' to Hannah, but in the Scripture those around Hannah respond differently.

Read:

³Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord. ⁴Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. ⁶Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. ⁷This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. ⁸Her husband Elkanah would say to her, 'Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?'

(1 Samuel 1:3-8)

Ask:

- How would you summarise Peninnah's and Elkanah's responses in modern-day language?
- In what ways do we need to be careful when we respond to those around us who are waiting for God to answer their prayers?



Statement Three:

Hannah was so upset that one of the priests, Eli, thought there was something 'off' about her.

Read:

¹² As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³ Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴ and said to her, 'How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.'

(1 Samuel 1:12-14)

Ask:

What assumptions do we often make about people who are facing challenging situations?

Say:

Instead of recognising Hannah's desperation, Eli assumed the worst. Rather than seeing someone pouring out their heart to God, he judged her based on what he thought he saw. His reaction reminds us how easy it is to misunderstand someone's situation when we don't know the full story.

Ask:

How can we avoid falling into the trap of judging others when we don't know the full story?

Statement Four:

Hannah told him that she had been praying because she had a broken heart.

Read:

¹⁵ 'Not so, my lord,' Hannah replied, 'I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. ¹⁶ Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.'

¹⁷ Eli answered, 'Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.'

¹⁸ She said, 'May your servant find favour in your eyes.' Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

¹⁹ Early the next morning they arose and worshipped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her. ²⁰ So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, 'Because I asked the Lord for him.'

(1 Samuel 1:15-20)

Say:

Hannah poured out her heart to God. She didn't have an immediate answer to her prayer, but she did have peace.

Ask:

What lessons can we learn from Hannah's experience of waiting on God?

Statement Five:

Hannah thanked God, and Samuel grew up serving the Lord in the Temple.

Say:

When Hannah's prayer was answered, she didn't move straight on to the next prayer request. She stopped to praise God and thank him for his faithfulness. Hannah's story reminds us that waiting isn't only about asking God for something. It's also about recognising his faithfulness when he answers.

Read:

¹ Then Hannah prayed and said: 'My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance.

² 'There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.

³ 'Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed.

⁴ 'The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength.

⁵ Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry are hungry no more. She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away.

⁶ 'The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.

⁷ The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.

⁸ He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and makes them inherit a throne of honour.

'For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's; on them he has set the world.

⁹ He will guard the feet of his faithful servants, but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness. 'It is not by strength that one prevails;

¹⁰ those who oppose the Lord will be broken. The Most High will thunder from heaven; the Lord will judge the ends of the earth.

'He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.'

(1 Samuel 2:1-10)

Ask:

- What words and phrases in Hannah's prayer stand out to you?
- What does Hannah's prayer tell us about her relationship with God?
- When God answers your prayers, how do you take time to thank him?

**Bridge****Ask:**

If someone asked you what Hannah's story teaches us about waiting on God, what would you say?

 Sound Check**Say:**

Hannah's culture viewed her as 'less than' because she couldn't have children. Although her situation was unique, many of us know what it feels like to carry expectations – our own or other people's – and to wait for God to answer prayers that matter deeply to us.

Leader's notes:

Today's discussion will be guided by the experiences of your group. The young people may want to connect Hannah's story with situations they are currently praying about, such as exam results, choosing a university or apprenticeship, finding work, relationships or health concerns. They may also want to explore the frustration of waiting when they can't understand why God hasn't answered their prayers. Encourage the group to listen well, respect one another's stories and avoid feeling pressure to share anything they aren't comfortable discussing.

Ask:

- Hannah felt societal pressure to have children. What kinds of expectations or pressures do you experience today?
- What expectations do you feel you currently have to meet?
- Do you think those expectations are in line with what God wants for your life?
- Is there anything you're currently praying about that you don't understand why God hasn't answered yet? If you feel comfortable, share it with the group.
- How do you think our faith grows while we are waiting for God to answer our prayers?

Leader's notes:

If your group has been following the series each week, take a few moments to revisit the 'Waiting on God' handout from Session One. Invite the young people to share any progress, answered prayers or changes to the way they have been praying.

If this is the first session for some members of your group, invite them to think about one situation where they are waiting for God to answer a prayer. If they feel comfortable, encourage them to share it with the group and spend some time praying for one another.

**Bridge****Ask:**

If you could ask Hannah one question about her experience of waiting, what would it be?





Selah

Say:

Throughout this series we're listening to songs that explore different aspects of waiting on God. Before we listen to today's song, take a moment to reflect on this question:

Ask:

What situations are you currently facing where you need to trust God and pray, 'Thy will be done'?

Leader's notes:

Encourage the group to hold that situation in their minds as they listen to the song. Afterwards, spend some time praying together, asking God to help you trust him as you wait.

Watch:

Hillary Scott & The Scott Family – 'Thy Will' (3:58)

www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAmh3yumzXs

**Say:**

In a piece of music, the coda brings the different aspects of the melody, harmonies and bassline to a conclusion. It pulls together the different themes and often, but not always, brings resolution to a piece of music.

Ask:

- As you reflect on everything you have learned today, what is your coda?
- What is one thing you have discovered from Hannah about prayer and waiting?

Leader's notes:

Give the young people a moment to think about your question and briefly share their coda with the group before the session comes to an end.

