

Do You Pray?

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. 1 Samuel, chapter 2.

We're going to look at chapter 1 as well, but if we take as our text, 1 Samuel, chapter 2, and reading again at verse 1. 1 Samuel, chapter 2, and verse 1.

And Hannah prayed and said, My heart exalts in the Lord. My strength is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in your salvation.

There is none holy like the Lord. There is none besides you. There is no rock like our God. And so on. Now, this past week, I started reading a new book.

And I love when I get a new book. Sad, I know. But as a minister, books are the things that excite you. But the thing about books is, and I'm sure it's a problem with many of us, is that the problem is that when we get a new book, we start it and we get a good chunk of the way through it.

[1 : 14] This is what I always do. I get a good chunk of the way through it. And I often don't get around to finishing it. And that's because I get another new book. And so the cycle keeps on going.

And in fact, I have a library that's full of books that I've started reading that I haven't actually got around to finishing yet. One day we'll get there. But my new book, it's a reprint of an old book based upon the writings of my favorite author and good friend, J.C. Ryle.

If you've never heard of J.C. Ryle, if you've never read anything by J.C. Ryle, John Charles Ryle was a 19th century preacher and pastor. He died in 1900, but he's one of my favorite authors.

And he's my favorite author because he's so readable and he's so relevant, even though he was in a previous century. And that's certainly true about my new book because it's called Do You Pray?

Do You Pray? The full title of the book is Do You Pray a Question for Everybody? Do You Pray a Question for Everybody?

[2 : 17] And one of the first things that J.C. Ryle says in his book, I'll put the link to the book. You can get a PDF of it. I'll put the link of it into next week's notices. But one of the first things that J.C. Ryle says in his book is to be prayerless is to be without God, without Christ, without grace, without hope, and without heaven.

It is to be in the road to hell. That is why I ask the question, says Ryle, Do You Pray? Do You Pray? I recommend the book to you because, as Ryle says, it's a question for everybody.

Do you pray? And we're asking that question, Do You Pray? because that's the question we've been challenged and confronted with in this passage. In fact, Hannah's prayer should make us examine and even inquire about our own prayer life, which is why I'd like us to think about this question, Do You Pray?

under three headings this morning. Hannah's providence, Hannah's prayer, and Hannah's praise.

So we're looking again at Hannah. Hannah's providence, Hannah's prayer, and Hannah's praise.

So first of all, Hannah's providence. Hannah's providence. If you go back to chapter 1, at verse 9, we read there, After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose.

[3 : 42] Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly.

Now I don't know about you, but I love the word providence. It's a wonderful word. It's a word that originates from Latin and it means seen beforehand or to see beforehand.

And it emphasizes that the Lord has seen all our situations and all the circumstances in our lives beforehand, before they took place. He saw them even before the foundation of the world.

The Lord has seen it all take place beforehand, which means that our lives are not a random result of luck or chance or fate or fortune or karma.

No, the amazing thing about the Lord is that the Lord knows all the people that we will meet and all the places we will go and all the events and all the experiences that we will encounter in our lives. [4 : 47] It's all according to the Lord's perfect plan and providence. He has seen it all take place beforehand. And that's because, as we said before, He's the one who writes the narrative of our lives.

He's the author of the story of your life. He's the director in the drama of your life. We might not understand the storyline. We might not foresee all the twists and the turns in the narrative, but He's the one who turns the pages of our providence.

And whether we can see Him in it or not, in all that we go through in our lives, the Bible teaches us that He is working it all together by His grace for our good and to His glory.

And that's certainly true when we come to the book of Samuel. As we said, the book of Samuel, it's part of the Lord's perfectly planned and providential story of salvation. A story which began in the book of Genesis with the promise of a seed and a son and a Savior.

And that story, it's following all the way through the Bible, this golden thread all the way through the pages of history and the pages of our Bible. And it's all part of the Lord's perfectly planned and providential story of salvation.

[6 : 08] And where Samuel fits into that story of salvation is that in those days, in the days of Samuel, there was no king in Israel. And because there was no king in Israel, everyone was doing what's right in their own eyes.

Therefore, Israel needed a king. They needed to remember first and foremost that the Lord was their king, but they've rejected the Lord. They had other gods. So they needed another king. They needed King David because King David was the seed, son, and Savior of Israel.

But King David, as you know, he's always a pointer. He's always the preparation for the greater king, the greater seed, son, and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. But the thing is, the story of Samuel, as we see even in the opening chapter, it's overshadowed by Hannah's painful providence.

Hannah's painful providence. Because we're told earlier in the chapter, verses 6 and 7, we're told on two separate occasions that the Lord had closed her womb.

The Lord had closed her womb. Now, as you know, Hannah, she was part of this polygamous and problematic marriage with Elkanah and the other woman, Peninnah.

[7 : 20] With Elkanah, he loved Hannah for who she was, but he also loved Peninnah because she was the one who gave him lots and lots of children. Elkanah, as we said last week, he had a divided love, which is the reason we're introduced to him right at the beginning of the book of Samuel.

Elkanah is a picture of the people of Israel. He's a portrait of what was going on at the time, that Israel as a nation was part of a polygamous marriage.

They had divided love, a divided love where they loved the Lord on the one hand, but they also loved following idols on the other. Their covenant disobedience had brought barrenness, which is why Hannah is also this picture of an image and illustration of spiritual barrenness.

But this was Hannah's painful providence. But Hannah's barrenness was not the only painful providence in her life, because as we touched on last Lord's Day, Hannah was part of this problematic marriage, this polygamous marriage, in which Penina, the other woman in the marriage, she would provoke Hannah.

She would insult and irritate Hannah. She would taunt and torment Hannah. She would bully Hannah because of her barrenness, to the point that Hannah felt isolated, isolated and ignored in her own home by her own husband.

[8 : 46] What made things worse was that Hannah was not only misunderstood by her husband, as you read there in verses 9 onwards, she's also misunderstood by her minister. Because when barren and broken Hannah goes to the temple to pray, Eli the high priest, whose calling in life, like every minister, is to be caring and compassionate towards his congregation, and yet Eli slates this woman.

He castigates her. He criticizes Hannah for being a drunken woman coming to church. Eli completely misreads and misunderstands Hannah's painful providence.

But you know, when Hannah was misread by her husband, and misunderstood by her minister, that was the means. That was the means by which Hannah turned to the Lord in prayer.

Because in her painful providence, in her brokenness, and in her barrenness, Hannah was made to realize that she needed to rest in and rely upon the Lord and not people.

Hannah was made to realize in her painful providence that she was to rest in and rely upon the Lord. And I know I've said this before, but I want to say it again, and I want to say it carefully, compassionately, and cautiously.

[10:09] Because, you know, what we see here in Hannah's painful providence is that the Lord allowed a painful providence to come into her personal life. Not to drive him, not to drive her away from him, but to drive Hannah to him.

That's what we see. The Lord closed her womb. And the Lord allowed this painful providence to come into Hannah's personal life, not to drive her away from him, but to drive her to him. And that's the same in our lives too, is it not? The Lord allows painful providences to come into our personal lives, not to drive us away from him, but always to drive us to him.

And I find sometimes like Hannah, the Lord brings us right to the end of ourselves, where we are made to see that we are emptied of our own resources.

We're emptied of our own strength. We hit absolute rock bottom and we have nothing left. We're coming absolutely weak and we're echoing the words that we were singing earlier in Psalm 130.

[11:19] Lord, from the depths, to thee I cried. My voice, Lord, do thou hear. Unto my supplications' voice, give and attend to via.

Do you know, my friend, Hannah's painful providence, that's what led her to pray. Hannah's painful providence led her to pray.

And I hope that whatever painful providence you have encountered or experienced in your life, you're able to say, had the Lord not brought that into my life, I would never have cried to Him in prayer the way that I did.

I would never have learned about His love, His deep love, the way that I have learned it. I would never have discovered His strength and His sustaining grace when I was absolutely broken in my time of need.

My friend, Hannah's painful providence, that's what led her to pray. Which is why I want us to consider, secondly, Hannah's prayer. So we see Hannah's providence, how it links into Hannah's prayer.

[12:31] Hannah's prayer. Look at verse 10. We read there that it says, She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. And she vowed a vow and said, O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life and no razor shall touch his head.

As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was speaking in her heart, only her lips moved and her voice was not heard. Therefore, Eli took her to be a drunken woman.

Try praying. I'm sure you've heard of that evangelistic resource, try praying. It's aimed at those who say that they're not religious or they don't do church.

I'm sure you've seen the try praying advertisements. Maybe you've seen them on buses, if you're on the mainland, or on billboards, or on buildings. Because in a day and generation when so many people claim and they confess to be atheist, the try praying resource, which I'll also add to the newsletter.

It's a seven-day prayer guide that can be passed on to friends, family, work colleagues, and neighbors. And it just comes with the encouragement, this simple encouragement where you hand it over to a friend or a neighbor or family member and say, well, why don't you try praying for a week and see what happens?

[14:06] Why don't you try praying for a week and see what happens? And you know, it was because of this apathy and absence of prayer, even in the 19th century, that J.C. Ryle asked the question, do you pray?

Do you pray? Try praying. In fact, Ryle wrote, this is what he writes in his book, I believe that thousands of people never say a word of prayer at all.

They eat, they drink, they sleep, they rise, they go to their work in the morning, they return home at the end of the day, they breathe God's air, they see God's Son, they walk on God's earth, they enjoy God's mercies, they have dying bodies, they have judgment and eternity before them, but they never speak a word to God.

They never speak a word to God. My friend, do you pray? Do you pray? And when Ryle asks, do you pray? He doesn't mean, do you say your prayers at night?

Because as Ryle points out in his book, he says, it's one thing to say your prayers, it's another thing to pray. It's one thing to say your prayers, it's another thing to pray.

[15:23] Because there's always, as we all know, there's always the danger of insincerity when we're reading or reciting prayers. I often think that with the Lord's Prayer, which we often say every Sunday morning.

We say it so often, and we say it together so often, but do we think about what we're saying when we're praying it? Are we thinking about what we're saying?

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen. There's also other prayers that are often recited. The serenity prayer. It's often recited at AA meetings. God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

[16:33] Or maybe there's the Christian child's prayer. That's what it's called. But I'm sure we were all taught it maybe at a young age. Tonight, as I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep.

If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. Amen. My friend, it's one thing to read and recite our prayers.

It's another thing to pray. And even as Christians, our prayers can become parrot-fashioned prayers rather than passion-filled prayers.

Our prayers can become parrot-fashioned prayers rather than passion-filled prayers. And when our prayers are parrot-fashioned prayers, we pray like the Pharisee.

The Pharisee in Jesus' parable who prayed from his head. And he said, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men. But when our prayers are passion-filled prayers, when we pray like the publican who prayed from his heart, who prayed wholeheartedly to the Lord, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[17:44] God, be merciful to me, a sinner. You know, when we pray like the Pharisee, as Jesus says, that man went away righteous. That's the prayer that's heard.

And that's how Hannah prays here. She didn't come before the Lord reading and reciting her prayer. She didn't pray the parrot-fashioned prayer that all the Israelites often prayed, the Shema, hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

No, Hannah prays this passion-filled prayer. She prays from her heart. She prays wholeheartedly. She pours her soul out before the Lord.

Because we're told in verse 10, she was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly. When was the last time you prayed like that?

When was the last time you prayed to the Lord and wept bitterly? Here is Hannah, a passion-filled prayer. Literally, verse 10 reads, Hannah was in bitterness of soul and prayed to the Lord weeping bitterly.

[18:53] There's an emphasis on the bitterness. Hannah was in bitterness of soul. She's burdened. She's bitter. She's barren. And she's praying to the Lord. She's weeping bitterly.

But the thing is, Hannah wasn't bitter because of her painful providence. Hannah wasn't bitter towards the Lord, as some people often are.

Hannah was bitter because of her brokenness. And she's bringing the burden to the Lord in prayer. Hannah was bitter because of her brokenness.

She's absolutely broken. She's deeply distressed, praying to the Lord and weeping bitterly. And you know, the same word there, bitterly, it's used to describe another weeping woman in Israel and her painful providence.

Because you remember Naomi, she's only a few pages earlier. If you just turn over the page in your Bible, she's just a few pages earlier in the previous book, the book of Ruth.

[19:58] We're told there that when Naomi lost her husband and then lost her two sons, she returns home to Bethlehem. And when the people of her village saw her, they said to her, is this Naomi?

Is this Naomi? But what does Naomi say? Chapter 1, verse 20, Call me not Naomi. Call me Mara, because the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.

And here's Hannah. Here's this weeping woman with a painful providence. And as we said, she's barren, she's broken, she's bitter, she's burdened, she's bringing it all to the Lord in prayer.

But her prayer is a passion-filled prayer. She's praying from her heart. She's pouring out her soul to the Lord. She's honest with the Lord.

She knows that the Lord knows her intimately and personally. So she's honest with Him. She's wholehearted with Him. Which should make us question our prayers. Do you know, as I studied Hannah this week, that's when I started questioning myself.

[21 : 03] Murdo, what about your prayers? It should make us question our prayers. Because as we said, it's one thing to say our prayers, it's another thing to pray. And so we need to ask ourselves, are we honest with the Lord?

Are we honest with the Lord? Do we pray with our heart or are we praying with our head? Are we wholehearted in our prayers? My unconverted friend, are you wholehearted when you are asking the Lord to save you?

Or are you just saying it because you've always said it? Are you wholeheartedly asking the Lord, Lord, save me? Pouring out your soul before the Lord.

Is it a passion-filled prayer? Or is it just parrot fashion? Parrot fashion. But what the Lord wants, what the Lord hears, is the passion-filled prayer pouring out your soul before the Lord.

And so my friend, I want to ask you, as J.C. Ryle asks you, do you pray? Because it's a question for everybody. Do you pray? Next time, I want us to consider Hannah's vow of dedication.

[22 : 14] We'll come to that in verse 11. I know we're going slowly through chapter 1, but it's important. We'll look at the vow of dedication to the Lord in relation to the rest of the chapter. But you know, when you look at Hannah's prayer and you see how passion-filled her prayer was, what's sad is that her high priest misunderstood her prayer.

Eli thinks Hannah is drinking spirits. She's drunk, but Hannah confesses she's troubled in spirit. What's worse, you know, when you read the authorized version, verse 16 describes in the ESV, it describes Hannah as a worthless woman.

In the authorized version, Hannah is described as a daughter of Belial. She's a daughter of the devil. That's how the priest views this woman coming before the Lord in prayer. Her minister completely misunderstands her.

He gets it all wrong. But as we were saying last week, Hannah's high priest in heaven, he never had a wrong. He knew her heart.

He knew that she was genuine. He knew that she was pouring out her soul before the Lord. He would never misread or misunderstand or misjudge or misrepresent Hannah. Hannah knew that our great high priest Jesus is one to whom we can come because he has a throne of grace.

[23 : 35] And it's at that throne we obtain mercy and find grace to help in our time of need. And you know, our great high priest, my friend, he knows. He knows our heart.

He knows our helplessness. He knows our burdens and our brokenness. He knows our sicknesses and our sorrows. He knows our sins and all our shortcomings. And as we were saying last week, even when we don't have words, he understands our sighs.

He knows our groans. He recognizes our tears and he receives our tears in his bottle. He writes them in his book. My friend, with such a great high priest in heaven, why would you not want to come before him in prayer?

You have the greatest access to the greatest throne. Why would you not want to come before him in prayer?

So do you pray? Do you pray? So what we see, lastly and briefly, is that Hannah's prayer, Hannah's providence and Hannah's prayer, they lead to Hannah's praise.

[24 : 48] Hannah's praise. Look at chapter 2 and verse 1. It says there, And Hannah prayed and said, My heart exalts in the Lord.

My strength is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation. There is none holy like the Lord. There is none besides you. There is no rock like our God.

These verses, the opening verses of chapter 2, they are what you could call an extended and expanded version of Hannah's prayer from chapter 1.

The reason they're put at the beginning of chapter 2 is so that they don't disrupt the flow of the narrative from chapter 1. But I want us to see that they're connected. That where Hannah is praying and weeping bitterly at verse 10 of chapter 1, they're connected to chapter 2, these verses are connected to chapter 2 by these opening words, And Hannah prayed and said.

But what you see about Hannah's prayer is that it's gone from weeping to worship. Hannah's prayer includes praise.

[26 : 02] Hannah's prayer includes praise. In fact, these opening verses in chapter 2, they've often been regarded and referred to as Hannah's song. Where Hannah praises the Lord in her prayers.

She gives thanks to the Lord and praises the Lord in her prayers. Hannah prays there, verse 1, Hannah praises the Lord in her prayers.

Her prayers have gone from weeping to worship. And throughout her song, throughout her prayer, Hannah praises the Lord for being sovereign, for being superior, for being supreme over all.

Hannah praises the Lord for His perfect plan, His perfect path, His perfect providence in her life, even though her life is a painful providence.

And yet, Hannah here, she praises the Lord in her prayers. What's more is that right at the end of her prayer, Hannah praises the Lord for His promise.

[27 : 16] His promise of a seed, son, and Savior in Israel. She prays right at the end of verse 10 there. She says, the Lord will give strength to His king and exalt the power of His anointed.

The Lord will give strength to His king and exalt the power of His anointed. And as we said, in those days, the days of Samuel, there was no king in Israel. Everyone was doing what's right in their own eyes.

Therefore, Israel needed a king. They needed King David because King David, he's the seed, son, and Savior of Israel. But what I love about Hannah's prayers is that she not only praises the Lord in her prayers, she praises the Lord for His promise.

She's clinging to the promise. Another reminder, cling to the promises in your prayers. Hannah clings to the promise of the Lord, the promise of a seed, son, and Savior.

Because she says there, right at the end of verse 10, the Lord will give strength to His king and exalt the power of His anointed, or literally, His Christ.

[28 : 23] That's what the word anointed means. It means Christ. Therefore, Hannah's prayer of praise is that the Lord will give strength to His king and exalt the power of His Christ.

Which should immediately make us see that King David is only a pointer. King David is only the preparation for the greater king. King David is foretelling and foreshadowing the greater seed, the greater son, the greater Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here in the Old Testament, Jesus is to be found. And Hannah is praying, saying the Lord will give strength to His king and exalt the power of His Christ.

And you know, it should be a reminder to us that we should praise the Lord in our prayers. We should praise the Lord in our prayers, even in painful providence. Because you know, our prayers, our prayers are not just to be full of I wants, I wants, Lord give me please.

They're not to be full of personal petitions and please. Our prayers should be full of praise. Full of praise. We should praise the Lord in our prayers.

[29 : 39] because there are many men and women in the Bible who not only petition the Lord and plead before the Lord in prayer, but they also praise the Lord in prayer.

We see that with Moses, the mediator of the people of Israel. We see it with Solomon in the temple, Daniel in Babylon, Mary in her Magnificat in the New Testament.

We see it with Paul and Peter's prayers when they're even in prison. They all praise the Lord in prayer. They praise the Lord in prayer for who He is and for what He has done through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And all the time this passage is asking us the question, it's asking me the question, do you pray? Do you pray? It's one thing to say your prayers.

It's another thing to pray. The time has gone, but the last word this morning, I want to give it to my good friend, J.C. Ryle.

[30 : 42] Because in his book, Do You Pray? A Question for Everybody. Ryle writes, let me speak a parting word to those who do not pray.

He says, prayerless reader, prayerless reader, I can only warn you that you are in a position of fearful danger. If you die in your present state, you are a lost soul.

It's useless to say that you don't know how to pray. Prayer is simply speaking to God. It needs neither learning nor wisdom nor knowledge to begin it. It needs nothing but heart and will. It is bad enough to be unconverted and going to hell, he says. It is even worse to say, I know it, but I will not cry for mercy. Isaiah says, seek ye the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Seek the Lord while he may be found. [31 : 50] Call upon him while he is near. my friend, do you pray? Do you pray? Do you pray? Let's all pray together.

O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks for this wonderful access we have to the throne of grace and to know that it was once a throne of holiness veiled by a thick curtain where no man could approach. And yet we give thanks today that through the blood of Jesus, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, that we are able to approach this throne and to come even with boldness, to come with brokenness, to come with all our burdens and all our baggage and to know that we come before one who knows us better than we know ourselves. O Lord, help us, we pray, teach us to pray. Help us, Lord, to cry to thee for mercy and as thy people to keep coming, to be found often in the closet, calling upon our Father which art in heaven, knowing that he who sees in secret will reward us openly. Bless us, Lord, together we ask. Bless us as a congregation that we would be known as a prayerful people crying to the Lord, knowing that thou art the God who does hear us and answer us in accordance with his will.

[33 : 18] Go before us and we pray, do us good for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service this morning to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 116.

Psalm 116, it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 395. Psalm 116, we're singing from the beginning down to the verse 6.

As we said, all of our Psalms this morning they focus upon the theme of prayer. Psalm 130 was a prayer from the depths to the heights. Psalm 63 was an early morning prayer. And here is Psalm 116. You're loving the Lord because you know he hears your prayer. I love the Lord because my voice and prayers heeded here.

I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear. Of death the cords and sorrows did about me compass round. The pains of hell took hold of me.

[34 : 28] I grief and trouble found. Upon the name of God the Lord then did I call and say, Deliver thou my soul, O Lord. I do thee humbly pray. God, merciful and righteous is.

Yea, gracious is our Lord. God saves the meek. I was brought low. He did me help afford. We'll sing these verses of Psalm 116 to God's praise.

Psalm 116 I love the Lord because my voice and prayers heeded here.

I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear.

Of death the cords and sorrows did about me compass round.

[35 : 43] the pains of hell to hold on me. I grief and trouble found.

upon the name of God the Lord then did I call and say, deliver thou my soul, O Lord, I do thee humbly pray.

God, merciful and righteousness, yea, gracious is our Lord.

God saves the meek. I was brought low. He did me help afford.

Lord. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.