

Searching Your Heart in Prayer

Read [1 Samuel 1:1-2:11](#)

Listen to the following testimony from Pastor Garret Jaks in Mississippi: “In the early days of our church, we met in a movie theater. It was a tough situation for us: there was poor lighting, no place for classes, they moved us to different theaters each week, one time a movie started in the middle of services, some theaters weren’t air-conditioned—which is a problem in Phoenix in the summer.

Then the owners raised the rent on us. We were a small church living out of a trailer, and the increase ate us up. We were not able to deposit any money into our Building Fund, which meant we were not making any progress toward our future.

I decided I needed to ask the owners to lower the rent. First, however, I prayed about it, asking God to give us favor with the owners. After all, we were doing his work, and this was a need we had. Surely he would work on our behalf.

I approached the owners and pled our case, and their answer was very clear: “No.”

I was disappointed. To be honest with you, I felt like God had let me down. I know enough to know that God can’t ever *really* let me down. He’s perfect, and always does what is right and good. But sometimes you can *feel* something when you *know* better.

But that’s not the end of the story. The theater owners’ “No” caused me to begin to search my heart. I began to wonder if God might be leading us to look for another place to meet. I talked it over with our music minister one afternoon on the phone, and we decided that we should look into meeting at a nearby school that had just built a new cafetorium (as they called it). I hung up the phone, turned on the TV, and there was a news story about that very school! A positive story about a new anti-drug program. A coincidence?

We rented the school and began holding services there, and our church began to take off. People from the community came to Christ. Our attendance doubled. Our finances increased. We went from being a “mission”—a fledgling congregation dependent on a parent church for its survival—to being a real church in our own right, able to stand on our own.

My point is that all of this happened because God had not met the “need” we had prayed about. Because the theater owners said, “No,” we began to search our hearts and adjust our prayer to line up with God’s real plan for our church: a move to a new location.”

If a need you have prayed about has not been met, it could be that you need to adjust your prayer. As we have learned in this so far, the third characteristic of a prayer that meets needs is a prayer that asks *according to God's plan for our life*. If your prayer has not been answered, search your heart to see if you need to adjust your prayer to line up with God's real plan for your life.

A lady in the Bible did this. Her name was Hannah, and she was one of two wives of a man named Elkanah. Hannah's need was to become pregnant and have a child. Not only did she have the natural desire for a child, but she wanted to escape the social stigma that came from being childless in her society—it was considered a curse from God. In addition, her husband's other wife, who did have children, *"would provoke her bitterly to irritate her"* ([1 Samuel 1:6](#)). You can imagine.

Year after year, when this family *"went up to the house of the Lord"* ([1 Samuel 6:7](#)) to worship, Hannah presented her request for a child to the Lord. But the prayer had never been answered, and *"her rival"*—the other wife—*"provoked her till she wept and would not eat"* ([1 Samuel 1:7](#)). Her husband said to her, *"Hannah, why do you weep and why do you not eat and why is your heart sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"* ([1 Samuel 1:8](#)).

Finally the year came when Hannah prayed the prayer that resulted in her giving birth to a son. She stood weeping in front of the house of the Lord and prayed:

¹¹ She made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head."

[1 SAMUEL 1:11](#)

She had prayed year after year for a son, but now she adds a promise. What is the promise?

She promises that she will give the son back to God. What did this mean? Her husband was a Levite, meaning he belonged to the priestly clan in Israel. Any son he had would also belong to the priestly clan, and be obliged by the Law of Moses to be available for service at the house of God from age 25 to 50. What Hannah was promising was that she would make her son available for service at the house of God from childhood.

This prayer worked:

²⁰ It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of the LORD."

[1 SAMUEL 1:20](#)

Hannah kept her promise. After raising Samuel for a few years, she took him to the house of the Lord to be apprenticed to the high priest Eli. Samuel would grow into a great prophet, who would shepherd Israel through the transition from a confederation of tribes into a kingdom. He would be in a position to accomplish these things as a result of growing up at the house of the Lord, the center of Israel's religious and political life. And he would be there because Hannah had kept her promise and given him to the Lord.

It had always been God's intention to answer Hannah's prayer for a son. But he had a special plan for that son, a plan that required Hannah to dedicate her boy to the Lord. So he waited until Hannah, after years of disappointment, finally searched her heart and prayed according to God's plan for her life. When she said yes to this plan, the answer came.

Again, we have learned so far that there are three characteristics of the kind of prayer that results in needs being met: **a prayer that asks, that asks *specifically*, and that asks *according to God's plan for our life***. Hannah had *asked* (for a child). She had asked *specifically* (for a son). Finally, she searched her heart and asked ***according to God's plan for her life***. Then her need was met.

What about you? If a need has not been met, search your heart to see if you are praying according to God's will for your life.