



**Open Learning**

**School for In Service Training and Development**

**F16**

**Is This your Life?**



*Old Testament Studies on living and growing in relationship with God.*



**Open Learning**

**School for In Service Training and Development**

**William Booth College**

**Denmark Hill**

**London**

**SE5 8BQ**

020 7326 2787

020 7326 2837

[tom.stirling@salvationarmy.org.uk](mailto:tom.stirling@salvationarmy.org.uk)

[kathryn.stirling@salvationarmy.org.uk](mailto:kathryn.stirling@salvationarmy.org.uk)

**Please send your assignments to:**

Deborah Goddard

Administrator

Open Learning

School for In Service Training and Development

William Booth College

Denmark Hill

London

SE5 8BQ

020 7326 2788

[deborah.goddard@salvationarmy.org.uk](mailto:deborah.goddard@salvationarmy.org.uk)

November 2014

**Welcome to Open Learning.** We hope that you enjoy your study of the Old Testament and that it helps you to grow in your own relationship with God. You may even be able to share what you have learned with others!

**About this course:** This Foundation level course contains six Old Testament studies. Each of them teaches something different about living and growing in relationship with God.

**Aim:** You will be introduced to five Old Testament characters and to one example of praise and thanksgiving in the Book of Psalms. The course also encourages you to reflect on your own relationship with God in the light of your study of the Bible passages set for each lesson.

**Learning Outcomes:** At the end of this the course you should be able to

- Describe and explain the content of each of the Old Testament passages you have studied.
- Explain at least one thing that you have learned from each lesson about your own relationship with God.

### **Content: six studies from the Old Testament**

Lesson 1: Trusting God - Abraham

Lesson 2: Encountering God - God and Moses in conversation

Lesson 3: Handling unhappiness - Hannah

Lesson 4: Dealing with discouragement - Elijah

Lesson 5: Running away from God - Jonah

Lesson 6: Praising and thanking God - Psalm 100

**Level:** The notes in this study guide give you information about each of the Bible passages for study. You are also expected to do some reading of your own and to use this and the notes provided to help you to answer the assignment questions. Helpful study resources are suggested on page 4 of the study guide.

**Assignments** for each lesson include studying a Bible passage. You are also asked to explain what each study has taught you about developing your own relationship with God.

You will be expected to provide information about the books you have used in your study by giving references and including a bibliography for each piece of written work you submit. Guidance will be given on how to do this.

## Lesson 3: Handling unhappiness - Hannah

**Learning outcomes:** At the end of this lesson you should be able to

- Describe how Hannah handles her unhappiness and how she responds to God's answer
- Explain what you have learned from the study passage about coping with unhappiness
- Explain what you have learned about responding to God's answers to your prayers

### **Bible passage for study:**

1 Samuel 1

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

 **1 a)** Giving examples from the study passage, describe how Hannah deals with her deep unhappiness.

**b)** Describe what Hannah does when her prayer is answered, making close reference to 1 Samuel 1: 20 - 28.

(Your answer to question 1 should total 400 words)

 **2** What has this study taught you about dealing with unhappiness?

(Your answer to question 2 should total 300 words)

 **3 a)** How have you responded to God when he has answered your prayers in the past?

**b)** Having studied this passage, what will you do differently in future when God answers your prayers?

(Your answer to question 3 should total 300 words)

**Setting the scene:** In the last lesson we saw how God called Moses to lead the Hebrews out of slavery and into a relationship with him before they moved into the land of Canaan God had long ago promised to give them. Life was not always easy in the land of God's promise. The different tribes of God's people lived scattered throughout the land, each having their own leader. These people faced many challenges, including neighbours who worshipped other gods, and those who wished to fight for a place in this fertile land of Canaan for themselves. God's people often failed to remain faithful to him, especially when their leaders did not set a strong example of fidelity to God themselves.

The story of Hannah shows us a little of what life was like among God's people at this time. It shows us not only what God did in Hannah's life, but also what he was doing in the life of his unfaithful people at the same time, even though many of them did not realise it.

**Hannah's story:** Hannah was the wife of a man called Elkanah. They worshipped God faithfully (1 Samuel 1: 3). *The Lion Handbook to the Bible* tells us that

'In the Old Testament a large family was seen as a great blessing from God' (2009: 143).

However, Hannah's story begins with the statement that she 'had no children' (1 Samuel 1: 2). The writer describes how Hannah would weep and refuse to eat, so great was her distress (1 Samuel 1: 7). God has withheld his blessing from her and although her husband loves her, he does not understand her suffering (1 Samuel 1: 5, 8). The story teller emphasises that Hannah's distress went on 'year by year' (1 Samuel 1: 7). It was made worse by the taunts of her husband's second wife Peninnah (1 Samuel 1: 6), who had succeeded in giving their husband sons *and* daughters to carry on Elkanah's family line (1 Samuel 1: 4). Hannah is in a desperately unhappy situation in which there appears to be no hope.

However, Hannah's people had been in situations that seemed hopeless before. For example, the story of Moses is a powerful reminder of the fact that God sees the distress of his people and responds to it (Exodus 3: 9 – 10). So Hannah, extremely distressed and weeping bitterly, expresses her suffering to God as she prays at the place of worship (1 Samuel 1: 9 – 10). She humbly asks God to give her a son whom she promises will be brought up to love and serve him all his life (1 Samuel 1: 11). Fortunately Hannah has confidence in God and is not put off by the stern telling off given to her by Eli the priest. Surprisingly, this man of God failed to recognise her pain and instead assumed that she was drunk! (1 Samuel 1: 14).

Having spoken honestly to God, Hannah leaves the place of worship believing that God has heard and will answer her prayer. In contrast to her earlier distress, Hannah is now able to eat and no longer looks or behaves as if she is sad (1 Samuel 1: 18). She and her husband return home and, in time, God 'remembered' Hannah (1 Samuel 1: 19) just as he had remembered his promise to Abraham when he heard the distressed cries of the Hebrew slaves and decided to rescue them (Exodus 2: 24 – 25). As a result of God's care for Hannah, she later gave birth to a son whom she named Samuel (1 Samuel 1: 20).

*The Lion Handbook to the Bible* tells us that the name Samuel means 'God hears' (2009: 257). God had heard and answered Hannah's prayer. It might have been natural for Hannah to want to keep her longed - for son to herself, but instead she gave him back to God exactly as she had promised to do when she asked God for him. Taking him back to the place of worship where she had prayed to God for him, Hannah said:

'For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted me the petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord' (1 Samuel 1: 27 – 28 NRSV).

1 Samuel 2: 19 – 20 shows how she continued to visit her son, bringing him clothes as he grew up learning how to serve God at Shiloh (1 Samuel 2: 11). God had answered Hannah's prayer, and in her turn Hannah kept the promise she had made to God. The story of Samuel's birth tells the reader that this was no ordinary person.

'In the Bible, when God has a special purpose for someone there is often something special about the birth' *The Lion Handbook to the Bible*. (2009: 255).

In giving Hannah the son she longed for, God was not only answering one woman's heartfelt prayer. He was also at work to restore his peoples' relationship with himself. The priest Eli's sons were also priests but they '...were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord or for the duties of the priests to the people....' (1 Samuel 2: 12). As Samuel was growing up 'The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread' (1 Samuel 3: 1). God's people did not hear his voice or see God at work in his world or in their lives. The situation of God's people seemed absolutely hopeless. They had strayed a long way from their God and could no longer experience his blessing.

By contrast, Samuel came to know God as a small child, growing up 'in the presence of the Lord' (1 Samuel 2: 21). As he grew he learned to listen to God's voice so that he could speak God's word to the people as he grew older. God revealed himself to Samuel, and in time, 'the word of Samuel came to all Israel' (1 Samuel 3: 21 – 4: 1). Samuel would grow up to become a man who spoke God's words to God's people, 'the first great prophet after Moses,' according to *The Lion Handbook to the Bible* (2009: 255). Samuel became an important leader who helped Israel move towards living as God's people under a human king chosen by God himself. Samuel anointed the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David, whose task it was to bring God's people together under one leader who would direct them in living in faithfulness to their God. The writer of the books of Samuel shows that the answer to Hannah's prayer was not simply his blessing on one woman who loved and trusted him. The amazing gift of a son to Hannah was also an answer to the great need of God's people for a leader who would bring the people back into unity with each other and with their God.

For Hannah *and* for his people Israel, in this story of the birth of Samuel God is shown to be at work, unexpectedly creating a positive future out of situations where there appeared to be no hope at all.



**To think about:**

*The New Application Commentary* comments on 1 Samuel 1 that

The chapter is a witness to God's transforming power, which creates a new historical possibility where none has existed. Hannah waits – and worships – in her barrenness, and so does Israel. The answer for both is a surprising gift of grace (2003: 60 - 61).

Study resources referred to in the lesson notes:

Arnold, Bill T. 2003 *1 & 2 Samuel The New Application Commentary : From biblical text ...to contemporary life*. USA: Zondervan

Alexander, P; Alexander, A 2009 *The Lion Handbook to the Bible* 4<sup>th</sup> Revised Edition. Oxford: Lion