

GOD LOOKS AT THE HEART

A Study of First Samuel

by Glenn Newton



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Introduction

How healthy is your heart -- not the organ that pumps blood through your body, but the center of your emotions and spiritual health? Most are familiar with the passage in First Samuel that says, *"For the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart"* (1 Samuel 16:7). We often quote this passage when talking about others and how we should not make judgments as to what is truly in a person's heart. But what if we use it in reference to ourselves... to examine our own hearts?

If God looks on our heart, what does he see? Is he happy with his findings? And if not, what should we do about it? If we went to the cardiologist and he saw something in our heart that shouldn't be there, we would do everything in our power to correct the problem for fear of death. If God sees something in our heart that should not be there, how much more effort should we put into removing it for fear of our "spiritual death?" This study of First Samuel will help us examine our hearts and give us some spiritual "cardio" that will strengthen us as we seek to "run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

About the Author

Glenn Newton has been serving as the preaching minister for the Pleasant View church of Christ in Pleasanton, California, since 2012. He has served in ministry since 1993 and has previously worked with churches in Alabama, Mississippi, Florida, and Washington. A 1997 graduate of Heritage Christian University, Glenn actively speaks at lectureships, workshops, and meetings throughout our country; has co-authored two other books (*The Great Commission Part 2* with Steve Cummings and *Elder/Preacher Relationship that Work* with his father Gene and his brother Mark), and authored three other "FLEX" studies. He and his wife Regina have been married since 1991 and have three sons and one grown foster son.



Lesson 1

The Heart of Selflessness

1 Samuel 1-2

Key Verse:

“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” (1 Samuel 1:11).

WARM UP



Have you ever made a promise to God? We have all heard stories of alcoholics who say, “Oh Lord, if you just let me make it through this night, I’ll never drink again”; the person who made some poor decision saying, “God, if you get me through this financial crisis, I will begin giving 10%”; or the popular, “God, if you just help me get this job, I’ll start going back to church.” Although each of these promises may have had good intentions when spoken, people rarely follow through on them. The problem with these types of promises is that they focus on “what God can do for me” rather than “what can I do for God”.

The book of First Samuel begins with a woman named Hannah making a promise to God: “God, if you will just give me a child, I will give him back to you.” Hannah was so desperate that the priest who saw her praying thought she was drunk. She was simply pouring out

her heart to God. But what was the difference between the promise she made and the ones we sometimes make? She actually kept hers!

WORK OUT



The story of Hannah is one we often reserve for Mother's Day sermons. Yet it is a story that has great application not only for women and mothers, but for all Christians seeking to follow God. Hannah is the epitome of selflessness. Hannah wanted a child, but her reasons for wanting a child were not the typical reasons. Sometimes people start a family to bring them closer together as a couple or to fill a sense of emptiness. Those aren't necessarily bad reasons, but Hannah's reason for having a child was so God would have another servant in his kingdom.

When I was preaching in Tacoma, Washington, we had two families at church with 11 children each. I often wondered why anyone would want 11 children. Bill Cosby once said that when people ask him why he has five children, he replies, "because we did not want six!" When I once asked Dan (one of the fathers) why he had 11 children, he replied, "I knew the more children we had, the greater impact our family could have for the kingdom." What a beautiful answer!

The very reason Hannah wanted a child was to make an impact for God. When we are making life decisions, do we think to ourselves, "which of these choices will have a greater impact on the kingdom?" When we ask God for something, are we planning and determining how we can give it back to him, or are we just making empty promises?

I believe that Hannah was able to keep her promise to God because she recognized some of his attributes that we often forget.

In 1 Samuel 2, after Samuel is born to Hannah, she worships God in prayer, remembering those things that make him a promise-keeping God:

UNIQUENESS

"No one is holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God" (1 Sam. 2:2).

Who else can do the things that God does? Doctors can't cure cancer, but God can. Psychiatrists can't completely remove emotional trauma, but God can. Humans can't forgive sin, but God can. Scientists can't create life from nothing, but God can! Job said that God *"is unique, and who can make Him change? And whatever His soul desires, that He does!"* (Job 23:13) God's very nature has always been unique in that he has the power and desire to help his children. Your doctor, counselor, or preacher may not know what you need. God not only knows, he cares.

WISDOM

"For the LORD is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed" (1 Sam 2:3).

In Greek mythology, Aurora, the goddess of the dawn, fell in love with Tithonus, a mortal youth. Zeus, the king of the gods, gave her the privilege of choosing a gift for her mortal lover. Aurora asked that Tithonus live forever, but she forgot to ask that Tithonus remain forever young. Consequently, Tithonus grew progressively older, but he could never die. The gift became a curse.

The God of the Bible is not like a mythological god. He never forgets anything that is not considered before He answers our prayers. He does not grant us a request which ultimately will become a burden. Therefore, we must accept His answers as the best for us. As the

psalmist said, "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways" (Psalm 139:1-3).

POWER

"The LORD kills and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and brings up" (1 Sam 2:6).

A Bible class teacher was examining her pupils after a series of lessons on God's omnipotence. She asked, "Is there anything God cannot do?" There was silence. Finally, one lad held up his hand. Disappointed, the teacher asked, "Well, just what is it that God cannot do?" "Well," replied the boy, "He can't please everybody." This is true, but he longs to answer our prayers and he has the power to do whatever we ask within His will. Of this truth, Jesus said, "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:11)

BENEVOLENCE

"He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory" (1 Sam 2:8).

We often look at God as a sort of a reluctant Santa Claus. As long as we don't make the naughty list, God will grant our requests. But just like with Santa, he probably won't give us exactly what we ask for. Nothing could be further from the truth! God wants to give us good gifts! When my wife and I go Christmas shopping, we don't think to ourselves, "now what can we get our children that they will absolutely hate?" We go to painstaking effort to try to purchase things they will love. We don't always succeed, mind you, but we try.

Considering the words of Jesus, if we try that hard to give our children good gifts, how much harder does God try? And furthermore, why do we give our children good gifts? Because we love them! Psalm 63:3 says, *“Your loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You.”* Hannah realized why God gave her the gift of Samuel: Because he loved her!

SECURITY

“He will guard the feet of His saints” (1 Sam 2:9).

We all love the passage from Romans that says, “nothing will separate us from the love of God,” but honestly, I’m not sure we really know what to do with it. When we begin talking about security, our thoughts tend to shift to the “Once saved, always saved?” discussion. Security simply means that God takes care of those who love him!

- Security is Job sitting in the dust, covered with sores, and saying, *“Though He slay me, yet I will trust in Him” (Job 13:15).*
- Security is Daniel, surrounded by hungry lions, sleeping like a baby.
- Security is David, straining his neck, telling Goliath that he is going to chop off his head.
- Security is Paul and Silas, sitting in prison, singing praises that shook the foundations!

Hannah rejoiced when her prayer was answered because she knew that God was a God who takes care of his children!

COOL DOWN



“God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?” (Numbers 23:19) God is a keeper of his promises! Yet God

keeps his promises in hopes that we will keep ours. Hannah asked God for a child -- and also made a promise to him. How did her story end? *"I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord"* (1 Sam. 1:28-29 NIV).

What promises have you made to God? How will your story end? Are you keeping your promises?

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever made a promise to God and failed to keep it? If so, why?
2. As you read over chapter 1, what attributes of Hannah do you see that led to her selflessness?
3. Of the five attributes of God in chapter 1, which one do you wish you had a better understanding of?
4. What other Bible passages refer to God as a God of promise?
5. What other Bible passages encourage us to keep our promises to God?
6. What else about the life of Hannah inspires you?