

Counting Our Blessings No Matter Our Circumstances

Lesson 03 in the series: "Getting Ready for the Holidays"

"Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus."

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NLT)

I. Hannah, the mother of the OT prophet Samuel, knew what it was like to endure holidays when she didn't feel like being with her family or giving thanks to God.

"There was a man named Elkanah who ...had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not. Each year Elkanah would travel to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the LORD of Heaven's Armies at the Tabernacle... So Peninnah would taunt Hannah and make fun of her because the LORD had kept her from having children. Year after year it was the same—Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the Tabernacle. Each time, Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat. 'Why are you crying, Hannah?' Elkanah would ask. 'Why aren't you eating? Why be downhearted just because you have no children? You have me—isn't that better than having ten sons?'" 1 Samuel 1:1-8 (NLT)

Note: In the Israelite culture, the inability to have children was considered a curse, and bigamy was considered an acceptable way to secure a male heir who could maintain the family line and property.

Note: Every October, the Israelites observed a holiday to give God thanks.

"You must observe the Festival of Shelters for seven days at the end of the harvest season, after the grain has been threshed and the grapes have been pressed. This festival will be a happy time of celebrating with your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows from your towns. For seven days you must celebrate this festival to honor the LORD your God at the place he chooses, for it is he who blesses you with bountiful harvests and gives you success in all your work. This festival will be a time of great joy for all." Deuteronomy 16:13-15 (NLT)

Life Application: We can thank God even when we don't feel like it because He is working in ways we cannot understand to accomplish things we don't believe possible.

"Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think." Ephesians 3:20 (NLT)

Life Application: We can thank God even when we don't feel like it because He will set things right.

"You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings." Psalm 23:5 (NLT)

"Trust in the LORD and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires. Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you. He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun. Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper— it only leads to harm." Psalm 37:3-8 (NLT)

II. When Hannah couldn't take any more, she surrendered her problems and her desires to God.

"Once after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance of the Tabernacle. Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the LORD. And she made this vow: 'O LORD of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime...' As she was praying to the LORD, Eli watched her. Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking. 'Must you come here drunk?' he demanded. 'Throw away your wine!' 'Oh no, sir!' she replied. 'I haven't been drinking wine or anything stronger. But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the LORD. Don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow.' 'In that case,' Eli said, 'go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him.' 'Oh, thank you, sir!' she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad." 1 Samuel 1:9-18 (NLT)

Life Application: We can thank God that we can bring all of our problems to Him and He will help us.

"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble." Psalm 46:1 (NLT)

“Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.” 1 Peter 5:7 (NLT)

Life Application: We can thank God that he uses trials and difficulties to draw us to himself and mature us spiritually.

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”

Matthew 11:28 (NLT)

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:2-4 (NIV)

III. Hannah knew what it was like to celebrate holidays when enjoyed being with her family and giving thanks to God.

“...the LORD remembered her plea, and in due time she gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, ‘I asked the LORD for him.’ When the child was weaned, Hannah took him to the Tabernacle in Shiloh. They brought along a three-year-old bull for the sacrifice and a basket of flour and some wine. After sacrificing the bull, they brought the boy to Eli. ‘Sir, do you remember me?’ Hannah asked. ‘I am the woman who stood here several years ago praying to the LORD. I asked the LORD to give me this boy, and he has granted my request. Now I am giving him to the LORD, and he will belong to the LORD his whole life.’ And they worshiped the LORD there. Then Hannah prayed: ‘My heart rejoices in the LORD! The LORD has made me strong. Now I have an answer for my enemies; I rejoice because you rescued me. No one is holy like the LORD! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.’” 1 Samuel 1:19-2:2 (NLT)

Life Application: We can thank God for answered prayers AND prayers he hasn’t answered yet.

“I waited patiently for the LORD to help me, and he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along. He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see what he has done and be amazed. They will put their trust in the LORD.” Psalm 40:1-3 (NLT)

“Each year his mother made a small coat for him and brought it to him when she came with her husband for the sacrifice. Before they returned home, Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, ‘May the LORD give you other children to take the place of this one she gave to the LORD.’ And the LORD gave Hannah three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD.”

1 Samuel 2:19-21 (NLT)

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

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Connect Group Questions

1. What is your favorite Thanksgiving dish? Who makes it best?
2. Describe a Thanksgiving holiday you dreaded attending when you were a kid. What made it so dreadful?
3. Ask someone in the group to read 1 Samuel 1 out loud. Who can you relate to best in this story? Why? What emotions does this story stir in you?
4. Discuss Ephesians 3:20, Psalm 46:1, and Matthew 11:28. What do these verses reveal to us about God?
5. Read Psalm 23:5 & 37:3-8. How does it make you feel to know that God will set all injustices right? How should this truth impact our lives?
6. Has the Lord used difficulty or trials this year to draw you closer to Him? If so, share what happened and how the experience has impacted your spiritual life. (See James 1:2-4)
7. Read Psalm 40:1-3. Ask everyone in the group to share at least one thing they are thankful for this year. Ask them to also share one prayer request they are waiting on the Lord to answer. Spend some time as a group praying about both.