



PLEASANT HILLS
COMMUNITY PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

Week of Sunday, April 18

*Questions with asterisks are meant to be answered by everyone in the group.
Leave time for prayer at the end of your small group gathering.*

Icebreaker

** If you had to pick one song to sing for karaoke, what would it be?

Questions for the Sermon Series, *Balanced Diet: Prayer*

Read this Bible passage to provide the context for the discussion questions that follow.

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord. Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year...

Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."

"Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.¹

¹ 1 Samuel 1:1-18

1. Were you able to read the Gospel of Mark this past week?
 - a. If not, what was your biggest barrier to reading the Bible in this way?
 - b. If so, can you briefly describe your experience with reading the Bible this way?
2. ** Without concern about how others might perceive you or how your story compares to other small group members, share your personal experience of prayer? Generally speaking, how would you describe it?
3. What, if anything, comes particularly easy for you in your experience of prayer?
4. What, if anything, makes prayer a difficult spiritual discipline for you?
5. Pastor Mark shared several stories about Christians in Church history who have had powerful prayer lives. Yet, his encouragement was to not overcomplicate prayer. What one thing might you do to take a step forward in your personal discipline of prayer?
 - a. Has anyone's experience (shared tonight or that you know about from elsewhere) challenge you in a positive way to develop your discipline of prayer?
6. What would be the personal and church-wide benefits if members of our church family would commit to the ongoing, daily discipline of prayer?
7. ** What questions do you still have about prayer?

This week's discipline: each person should choose one of these forms of prayer to practice daily.

- Breath Prayer
 - To pray a simple, intimate prayer of heartfelt desire before God.
 - Example 1: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me - a sinner."
 - Example 2: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want."
- Centering Prayer or Contemplative Prayer (spending time in God's presence)
 - To quiet the heart and rest in God alone.
 - Centering prayer is a form of contemplative prayer where the pray-er seeks to quiet scattered thoughts and desires in the presence of Christ.
 - Choose one word (like "Jesus" or "peace" or "grace")
 - Rather than constantly speaking in prayer, simply sit quietly and acknowledge God's presence for 10, 15, or 20 minutes.
- Praying with Scripture
 - Use these Psalms to guide your prayer times, making their words of prayer your own. Read and pray slowly, attempting to personalize the psalmist's prayer as genuinely yours: Psalm 91, Psalm 27, Psalm 139, Psalm 37, Psalm 35, Psalm 46, Psalm 19

Take prayer requests and close in prayer.