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**T.D. JAKES**

W H E N

**WOMEN**  
**PRAY**

10 WOMEN OF THE BIBLE  
WHO CHANGED THE WORLD  
THROUGH PRAYER

# When Women Pray

*10 Women of the Bible Who  
Changed the World through Prayer*

T. D. JAKES



New York Nashville

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## Introduction

She starts the day the same way she has started every day for years. For decades. Lowering her knees to the compacted dirt of her simple quarters, she sits back on her heels and bows her head toward the ground. In the quiet stillness surrounding her, she quiets the racing echoes of her mind. She wants to be ready for this moment—ready to speak and listen, to offer and receive.

Ready to pray.

It's 5:00 a.m. and she has much to accomplish. In an hour she will join the other members of her order for morning mass. That will be a respite. A chance to sit unknown and unrecognized among the rows of worshipers in blue and white habits. A chance to worship. A chance to be filled.

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Then it will be time to serve. To give of herself. When mass concludes, she will connect with each visitor in attendance, clasping every offered hand in both of her own, wrinkled fingers squeezing warmly. Next, she will walk the streets of her city to visit the sick and the needy. There is food and medicine to be offered. Comfort as well. Along the way, she will search for those cast aside by the rushing world: the sick, the unstable, the unwanted. She will especially seek out those children whose only shelter is the dusty streets and whose only comfort is the occasional scrap of food from pitying pedestrians.

She will find them, and she will bring them home.

In the afternoon, she plans to visit the old railroad warehouse the city government helpfully donated to her order. All she had to do was ask. When she greets the lepers who now reside there, she will touch each of them intentionally. Tenderly. So that they feel her love. So that they feel and know the love of Christ.

Later in the evening she will be swept away to the local airport to begin a long and arduous journey westward. She accepted an invitation to visit one of the order's orphanages in Paris. Or was it the home in the South Bronx, New York? She will need to find out. In any case, all of that is for later. All of that is for the future, which is a mystery to all but God.

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For now, in the quietness of this simple morning, she settles in once again to pray. The words come easily, as they should—she has spoken them every morning for more years than she can remember:

“Dear Jesus, help us to spread Your fragrance everywhere we go. Flood our souls with Your Spirit and Life. Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly that our lives may only be a radiance of Yours. Shine through us and be so in us that every soul we come in contact with may feel Your presence in our souls. Let them look up and see no longer us, but only Jesus!

“Stay with us and then we shall begin to shine as You shine, so as to be a light to others. The light, O Jesus, will be all from You; none of it will be ours. It will be You, shining on others through us.

“Let us thus praise You in the way You love best, by shining on those around us. Let us preach You without preaching, not by words but by example, by the catching force, the sympathetic influence of what we do, the evident fullness of the love our hearts bear for You. Amen.”<sup>1</sup>

Have you guessed the identity of this mystery woman? Her given name was Anjezë Gonxhe Bojaxhiu, but the world knows her best by a different title.

You know her as Mother Teresa.

At the age of eighteen, Mother Teresa began a life of

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missionary service—a ministry she lived and breathed for seventy years. In that time, she sought out “the unwanted, the unloved, the uncared for” among the streets and slums of Calcutta. She founded her own order, the Missionaries of Charity, within the Catholic Church—an order that has since expanded to include thousands of members in more than 140 countries. She launched orphanages and schools, hospitals and food banks. She helped care for orphans, lepers, the diseased, and the dying. She was among the first to establish a clinic for HIV/AIDS victims in the 1980s. And in her many public appearances, she was a regular and stalwart supporter of the truths recorded in God’s Word.<sup>2</sup>

Mother Teresa lived as a shining example of Jesus’ command to bless “the least of these.” Yet her many accomplishments were not based on her own goodness or her own strength, though both were considerable. Instead, she founded her ministry on the rock of God’s goodness and God’s strength—a practice that included daily setting herself before His throne by reciting the prayer offered above.

In short, the woman now revered as Saint Teresa of Calcutta is a testament to what can happen within a community and around the world when a woman prays.

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### Our Foundation for Life

Both today and throughout history, prayer has been a vital foundation for human culture and society.

The forms for that foundation were set when God first walked with Adam and Eve in the cool of the garden. From the beginning, humanity was hardwired to live in communication with our Creator. Then, the concrete for that foundation was poured over the course of centuries as God called out a people through which He revealed Himself to the world.

Abraham was a man of faith who lived in constant communication with God; as a result, God promised to bless his descendants by making them a great nation, and that through Abraham “all peoples on earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Jacob’s name was changed to Israel—“he struggles with God”—when he spent a night wrestling with God, which is a picture of prayer. Moses, perhaps the greatest leader the world has ever seen, was so dedicated to prayer that he regularly met with God “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Ex. 33:11). David, a man after God’s own heart, wrote psalms and prayers to God with such poignancy that we still recite them thousands of years later.

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God solidified the place of prayer as a foundation for our lives through the living example of Jesus Christ, who is God in the flesh. Our Lord made it a daily custom to go out “very early in the morning, while it was still dark,” to pray (Mark 1:35). Later, Jesus taught the world how to pray when He said, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name” (Matt. 6:9). And on the night before the cross—the most important moment in human history—the Son bowed before the Father and prayed with such intensity that His sweat was like drops of blood. “Not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

The New Testament writers took great pains to emphasize the critical role that prayer must play in our lives—as well as the benefits we receive by doing so. The apostle Paul wrote, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil. 4:6). The result? We will find “the peace of God” (v. 7). James exhorted Christ’s followers to “confess your sins to each other and pray for each other.” Why? “So that you may be healed” (James 5:16). And the author of Hebrews encouraged us to “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

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Note that none of these scriptures are given as suggestions for us to consider. They are commands for us to obey.

It's worth repeating: both today and throughout history, prayer has been a vital foundation for all who choose to follow God. Indeed, without establishing a direct connection to God through prayer, we cannot follow Him. We will have no idea where He is leading.

Now, I may know what you're thinking as you've read through these pages. *Bishop Jakes, this is supposed to be a book about women praying, but you keep talking about men. You've got Abraham and Moses, David and Paul. What gives?*

My answer is that while there have been many great men of prayer as individuals over the course of millennia, it is women in general who have carried the lion's share of that load.

Both today and throughout history, women have been especially powerful in taking up the mantle of prayer. While men of old cut timbers and tilled the ground to build our homesteads and cities, it was largely the prayers of women that established the spiritual sanctuary of our families. As men took up arms to fight the great wars of history, the prayers and petitions of women have regularly stemmed the tide of evil in spiritual battle. And though the majority

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of leadership positions in our churches are filled by men, it is mostly women who fill our sanctuaries with prayers and shouts of praise that reach the very throne of God.

I have seen these truths played out in my own life. Both of my grandmothers were dedicated to prayer. They were fierce and determined women who took seriously their role as part of the spiritual bedrock in their families and their communities. My mother was busy as an educator and a real-estate investor, yet she willingly gave of herself each day to teach her children how to pray and to invest in our spiritual lives. And what can I say of my wife, Serita? She is my true partner in ministry and in life, yet I am frequently in awe of the ease with which she steps into God's presence and the power of her prayers.

I especially love the way Serita has prayed for our children throughout their lives. I can remember her holding each little baby in her arms, her head bowed and voice softly whispering blessings by each infant's sleeping ears. I can see her standing outside each child's room at night, her voice still quiet but her arms now raised in intercession. A warrior engaged in battle.

Even now I feel my heart stir at these memories. There is nothing like a mother's prayers!

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Not only have I seen in my own life the wonder and the humility of women who pray, but I have also benefitted from such women—and benefitted greatly. I have no doubt I am writing these pages today because of the prayers of the matriarchs who came before me. Whatever success I have experienced in life and ministry has a direct connection to the women who have supported and encouraged me not only through their hard work and sound advice, but also through their constant prayers.

Our world is a stressful place in many ways. Life is constantly changing and continually presents new challenges. Yet I look to the future with confidence and joy. Why? Because I serve a great and mighty God. And because I have witnessed with my own eyes all the good that can happen when women pray.

### A New Call to Prayer

Speaking of change, it's worth pointing out that changes in our world often bring about new blessings in our lives. That has been especially true for women in recent history.

As I look out across cultures and societies today, I see women breaking new ground and blazing new

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trails in every way imaginable. Women are climbing corporate ladders at rapid speeds and ascending to the highest levels of success. They are running countries, leading with integrity and passion. They are launching businesses and spearheading innovations. They are excelling in the classroom, in the boardroom, and in every room.

Amazingly, women have championed these advances outside the home without sacrificing the precious lives within their homes. Because of changes in both technology and social norms, modern women are balancing work and family in ways that would have seemed impossible to mothers of previous generations. They are marrying wonderful men of God and partnering to raise gifted children who in their turn will bless the world anew.

As a pastor, I'm gratified by the progress I have seen in the lives of women in my community and in the larger world. We all benefit from these advances. We all win when women influence society to a greater degree.

As a father, however—and especially a father of daughters—it's difficult to express the depth of my gratitude. What a joy and a blessing to know that the women of earlier generations have opened new doors for my daughters, and that my daughters now have the

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opportunity to carve out exciting new vistas for their children.

Praise God!

Still, there's a danger that in our march toward progress and prosperity we may leave behind one of the key ingredients to our success. I am speaking about prayer.

This book is a call for women of all generations to continue their march toward equality and empowerment, yet to do so by once again embracing the power of prayer. This is a call for women in every community to dream like their daughters and pray like their grandmothers.

The world of the future will need women who understand both the power and the protection available only through prayer. We will need women warriors who can raise their swords in the continuing fight against oppression and injustice, and we will need women with shields to defend the innocent and the untrained.

It is only through prayer that such a widespread movement will be sustained. It is only through prayer that these wonderful advances will not only hold but continue forward.

Just as important, I want women to remember the wonder of prayer not only as a general principle but

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as something vital in their own lives. Prayer is a stress reliever. It's a chain breaker. It's a peace bringer, and it's necessary for every child of God, no matter their age or experience.

I remember watching a conversation between Oprah Winfrey and Maya Angelou on *SuperSoul Sunday*. Talking about prayer, Angelou said, "It changes things." How true that is!

Angelou went on to describe the ways she has personally benefited from prayer. "I know that when I pray, something wonderful happens. Not just to the person or persons for whom I'm praying, but also something wonderful happens to me. I'm grateful that I'm heard."<sup>3</sup>

That's what I want for you. To be heard. To be sustained. To find the joy and the peace and the confidence your Creator intended you to receive from Him long before the foundations of the earth were set down.

In the pages that follow, you will find stories of women who lived out these truths. Specifically, you will find ten women of the Bible whose propensity to pray in all circumstances set them apart as shining examples in the darkness of the ancient world.

As you read, I pray the light reflected by these women will both illuminate your mind and inspire

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your heart to follow in their example. I pray you will know the depth of insight, the breadth of compassion, and the height of worship all women can experience when they actively and intentionally bend their knees to pray.

## CHAPTER I

# Hannah

*When women pray, God brings about new life.*

**I**t had been a long day, and Eli settled gratefully into his chair near the doorway of the tabernacle. He stretched his legs and flexed his toes, working out the aches and pains long familiar from years of work.

Around him, the city of Shiloh buzzed with activity. A large group of travelers had arrived to offer their sacrifices to God. People and cattle milled about the various courts and lawns, each waiting for their turn. The smell of fire and smoke was strong in the air, infused with the tantalizing aroma of roasted meat.

From his chair, Eli could hear the voices of his sons,

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Hophni and Phinehas, as they performed the sacrifices within the interior of the tabernacle. Proclamations of blessing over families and children. Declarations of forgiveness. Vows and exhortations offered to God along with the necessary meat and salt and bread.

Because of his advanced age, Eli had passed much of the responsibility for these sacrifices down to his sons. But he remained the high priest, which meant there was still much for him to do. Much to accomplish and many people to greet. But for now he lingered in his chair, savoring the rest.

A motion at the corner of his eye caused Eli to glance out across the lawn. He saw a woman walking alone, which was unusual. No, not really walking—more like staggering. She had hugged both of her arms across her chest and was lurching and bouncing between people and horses and cattle as if her eyes were closed. When she turned in his direction, Eli saw her eyes *were* closed. More than that, her lips were moving rapidly without making any sound. She was mumbling to herself.

The old priest shook his head. He had seen it many times before. Wealthy families who offered large sacrifices shared a large meal together with their portion of the meat—which they often supplemented with more-than-generous portions of wine.

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What was meant to be a celebration of God's goodness and the cleansing of sin could quickly slide into debauchery.

"How long are you going to stay drunk?" Eli called out to the woman. He was a little surprised at his own outburst, but he hated to see such corruption so near to God's own house. "Put away your wine!"

When the woman opened her eyes and looked into his, Eli flinched. He couldn't help it. The pain he saw in her face told him he had been wrong in his judgment.

Oh, so wrong.

## Two Truths about Hannah

Hannah, the woman described above, is the first woman of prayer I want to highlight in these pages. There are several reasons for that choice. For one thing, Hannah's story is fascinating. It's also poignant and inspirational. But the main reason I am beginning this book with Hannah is that her story is so approachable. It's relatable.

I can say with confidence that Hannah's story will connect with your story in many important ways.

As we begin, there are two truths we need to know

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about Hannah in order to truly understand the depth of her story. The first is that Hannah lived with an unfulfilled longing.

In 1 Samuel we read that Hannah was married to a wealthy man named Elkanah. We know he was wealthy because he had enough resources to travel with his entire family to God's tabernacle at Shiloh every year in order to make sacrifices on behalf of his family. Not only that, the sacrifices Elkanah offered were cattle—sheep or goats or bulls. In the Jewish law, the poorer families of Israel were allowed to use bread or grain for their sacrifices, or perhaps a pair of birds. But Elkanah had a ready supply of meat. He was wealthy.

There's more. Not only was Hannah married to a wealthy man, the Scriptures say "he loved her" (1:5), meaning that she had been blessed with financial stability, a loving spouse, and spiritual vitality within her household.

What then could be wrong? What else could be missing?

The answer was children. Hannah was barren. Instead of carrying a child, she carried an unfulfilled longing. But there's another layer to Hannah's longing that is important to lay bare if we want to understand the depth of her situation—the depth of her sorrow.

Way back in the book of Genesis, God made a

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promise to Eve that one of her descendants would rise up and crush the head of the serpent we know as Satan. The verse is Genesis 3:15, which theologians call the *protevangelium*—“first gospel.” With the benefit of history, we know that prophecy refers to Jesus, whose death on the cross was the hammer blow that crushed Satan’s plans and power for all eternity.

For the ancient Israelites, however, the promise of Genesis 3:15 was a constant source of hope. No matter how dark the world became, no matter how sinister people behaved, there remained a promise from the Creator that evil would be defeated. As a result, Hebrew women counted themselves blessed through childbearing. Every new life kindled in every womb was an extension of God’s promise to one day make right all that had been made wrong.

Therefore, Hannah’s longing was not only for a child, but for the chance to participate in that blessing. That promise. She wanted a chance to deliver the One who would ultimately deliver everyone. Her barrenness excluded her from that opportunity, which made her unfulfilled longing all the more painful.

My father taught me never to ask a question when I already know the answer, so I won’t ask whether you, too, have an unfulfilled longing. I already know you do.

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Maybe you are similar to Hannah in that you have longed for years to feel the soft skin of an infant against your cheek and hear the laughter of children in your home. Maybe you yearn for a spouse to share your life with, or maybe you wish your current spouse would touch you and speak to you with tenderness rather than sharpness. Maybe your longing is for a career that would help you find meaning and purpose. Maybe it's financial stability. Maybe it's a house in which you can feel safe. Maybe it's a deeper knowledge of God and deeper experiences with Him.

Whatever your specific desire may be, we all carry the burden of unfulfilled longings. We all feel the burden and the void of dreams yet to come true.

The second truth we need to know about Hannah is that she had a rival. The Scriptures say Elkanah had two wives: Hannah and Peninnah. And listen to this: "Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none" (1 Sam. 1:2).

Can you feel the pain in that verse? The frustration? The text goes on to say that Peninnah continually "provoked" Hannah about their situation. She would intentionally push Hannah's buttons and remind her of her barrenness. This happened so frequently and so painfully that Hannah often "wept and would not eat" (1:7). She constantly mourned her lack of children,

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and she was constantly reminded of that lack because of her rival.

### From Provocation to Prayer

How do you respond when you feel provoked? I'm not asking how people are *supposed* to respond or how you would *like* to respond. How *do* you respond?

As an example, how do you respond when someone who looks the way you would like to look first comes into your orbit? Or your husband's orbit? How do you respond when a coworker lands the promotion you deserve? How do you respond when that mother at the park says something nasty because your kids aren't behaving as well as hers? How do you respond when you are provoked by a rival?

In my experience, there are two basic choices we can make when we respond to provocation. The first choice is to get jealous. To become envious.

When you see someone living out a blessing you have longed to receive, you get that bitter taste in your mouth. You covet, imagining how sweet life would be if you had what she has and she were stuck with what you've been dealing with all these years. *She doesn't even appreciate what she's got. Why in the world would*

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*God be so generous in her life when I've been praying and sacrificing and working for so much longer than she has?*

You can even reach a point in your envy and your bitterness that you try to tear the other person down to make yourself feel better. You can fool yourself into believing that making your rival feel smaller will somehow increase your own stature.

Or, you might even get cynical toward God Himself. *Lord, You know I deserve this blessing more than she does. God, I cannot believe You have ignored me month after month, year after year, and yet You respond instantly to the needs of someone who doesn't even worship You. It's not fair!*

Speaking frankly, the temptation to walk this path is strong for pastors and preachers. I remember many times during the early decades of my ministry when I would look around at others and feel the pull toward envy. Toward bitterness. *Imagine the impact I could make if I had that kind of platform. Imagine what our church could accomplish if we had this church's budget or that church's building.* Many times I was in danger of drifting into cynicism but for the wise counsel of those God had placed in my life to guide me toward a better way.

Thankfully, there is a better way.

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The second choice you can make when you are provoked by a rival is to pray. Specifically, you can recognize that if God chose to birth a blessing in your rival's life, then He has the power to birth that same blessing—or an even greater blessing—in you. Which means you should turn to Him in prayer and ask for that blessing rather than lay hands on what has already been given to someone else.

Do you realize that God often *intentionally* brings rivals into your life to provoke you? Not to provoke you to anger or jealousy, but to provoke you toward greatness. To poke you and prod you toward the potential He sees in you. When you encounter those who look better, do better, have better, love better, wear better, drive better—whatever the “better” is—you need to understand there is a real possibility God is using that provocation to point you toward Himself so that He can bless you in the same way.

Hannah chose the path of prayer. After a particularly painful dinner confrontation with Peninnah while the family was in Shiloh, Hannah rose from the table and prayed her way to the tabernacle. God's house.

When Eli saw her, she was “in deep anguish” and “weeping bitterly.” She appealed to the Lord: “If you will only look on your servant's misery and remember

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me, and not forget your servant but give her a son” (1:11). After the high priest confronted her, Hannah answered by saying, “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” (1:15–16).

Let me stop the story for a moment and offer a principle I believe is critical for prayer: whenever you approach the throne of God, be yourself.

Notice that Hannah did not rely on flowery language or ten-dollar words as she prayed. She cried out to God. Even as she wept bitterly, she wove an appeal through her weeping. She prayed with intensity. She prayed with fervency. She prayed with such passion and such desire that Eli believed her to be drunk. May the same be said of us! May the same be true of us when we bow our faces to the ground in front of our Heavenly Father and plead with Him about our deepest needs.

Do you sometimes feel God would grant your request if only you knew the right words to pray? If only you could find that exact turn of phrase? Reject that thought. There are no magic words in prayer. There is only the grace of God.

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Do you sometimes believe your prayers would be answered if only someone special would pray for you? Someone anointed? Someone more spiritual than you or more holy than you? Reject that notion. The Bible says, “There is no one righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10). You don’t need any person to make your prayers more effective. You need God’s Holy Spirit to intercede on your behalf.

Do you assume God would pay more attention to your prayers if you were a better person? Or do you try to behave better or act more “godly” on the days you pray because you think God will take you more seriously when you are more spiritual? Stop it. You can’t twist God’s arm and make Him do what you want; you can only kneel at His feet, pour out your heart, and believe He will answer—and that His answer will be for your benefit.

In short, when you come before God in prayer, come as you are. Stop worrying about your image and stop worrying about what you look like or what people might think about you. Fall on your knees before God with passion and fervency, and He will open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing you won’t have room enough to receive!

That’s what Hannah experienced.

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### Blessings of Life

I love what the Scripture says in 1 Samuel 1:19: “Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the Lord remembered her.”

It’s the last phrase in verse 19 that gets me every time: “the Lord remembered her.” Why? Because she prayed.

Now, that doesn’t mean God had forgotten about Hannah prior to that prayer. This was not a situation where God was out washing the car in the driveway and received a heavenly text message that said, “Hannah wants a baby,” then He smacked His forehead and said, “I forgot about her.” No! Our God is all-knowing and all-seeing. He is sovereign at all times, and He is constantly aware of every single moment of our lives.

The word *remembered* in verse 19 is a way of signaling in the Hebrew language that God made a decision to act. God had heard every one of Hannah’s past prayers throughout all the years of her life. He had answered every previous prayer by saying, “Wait.” “Wait.” “Not yet.” “Still not yet.”

But in this moment, after this specific prayer,

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God remembered Hannah and changed His answer. Responding to that prayer, He said yes. As a result, “in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son” (1:20).

Let me say something from the depths of my heart that I hope you will hear: God remembers you. I know you may find that difficult to believe, but hear me: He remembers you. He has always remembered you!

All the nights you wondered and worried about the future, God remembered you. All the times you did without, He remembered you. All the times you hugged a pillow and cried yourself to sleep, He saw you and stood by you and remembered you. Yes, sometimes you do things for other people and they forget you, but God doesn't forget you. I believe the Lord planned from the beginning of time for you to be right here in this moment reading the words on this page because He wants you to know He remembers you.

God has not forgotten you. Just as He did not forget Hannah.

More than that, God has a plan for you, just as He had a plan for Hannah. Specifically, He had a plan to bring a blessing to her body—to give life to her life.

God actively desires to create new life in our world. He actively desires to bring new life into your family.

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Even when you believe your dream is dead, God is ready and willing to resurrect that dream and breathe life into what you thought was lost.

That's why I'm so excited to see a new generation of women who pray—because prayer is the key that unlocks God's blessings!

Look at what Hannah said in verse 20: "She named him Samuel, saying, 'Because I asked the Lord for him.'" She asked. That is the beauty and the simplicity of prayer. We often make prayer more complicated than it needs to be, but at the core prayer is simply talking with God. It's telling Him about our needs and desires and asking Him to act. It's also listening to His voice when He answers those requests—because He does answer.

The name *Samuel* means "heard by God." Isn't it wonderful to know that we serve a God who hears us? We don't serve the idols of old that were deaf and dumb because they were carved by human hands. We serve a God whose hands reach out to touch us, whose eyes watch us with tenderness, and whose ears are always attentive to our prayers.

Take a moment to think about your unfulfilled longings—those dreams and desires you've carried for what seems like a lifetime. Are you talking to God about them? Have you asked God to receive them?

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If so, keep asking. He hears you. He has not forgotten you.

If you have not been asking God to receive those longings, there is no better time than the present. You don't need fancy words. You don't need to clean yourself up or find a preacher to pray on your behalf. Simply come to God as you are—and ask.

Because when women pray, God brings about new life.