

**WEEK 4**  
**LESSON GUIDE**

**IN THE SHADOWS**

**BIG IDEA**

When it feels like God doesn't hear you, keep praying.

**BIBLE**

1 Samuel 1:1–17; Psalm 138:1–3;  
Ephesians 6:18

**ABOUT THIS WEEK**

The shadows in our lives can cause us to lose sight of the people who want to listen and care for us. This week, we'll hear Hannah's story as she struggled to believe God was still with her. Her story shows us how to persevere through the shadows as she teaches us **when it feels like God doesn't hear you, keep praying.**

**WHAT?** *What are we talking about today?*

**ACTIVITY | Shadow Figures**

- Welcome back to our final week of *In the Shadows!* We have had a great time discussing ways to step out of the shadows and into the light. We're not finished just yet, so let's get started with a game!
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this game, you need a flashlight, a table, and several different types of objects. To play, have two players stand facing the audience. Place an object on the table behind each player. Shine the flashlight on the thing so its shadow appears before the players. The first player to correctly guess the object wins the round. To increase the game's difficulty, change the flashlight's angle to show a less clear side of the object.*
- Using shadows as a guide is pretty tough. Some objects are easily identifiable, but the shadow doesn't give us all the details. For example, you might know the shape of an object, but you wouldn't be able to see the color, texture, or any other essential details. So, a tennis ball would look similar to a baseball or an orange.
- Even though you don't have all the details when looking into the shadow, it doesn't mean you stop playing the game. It just means working harder to figure it out. But imagine if you didn't have the clues in front of you. Imagine if you couldn't see the reactions of the people watching or you couldn't hear us tell you your guess was correct. You might feel like you're just saying words and getting zero feedback.
- What do you do in those moments? Do you keep pushing? Keep guessing. How long would you be able to try and figure out what's in front of you before you felt like giving up? It can be hard to keep going if no one is listening.

**DISCUSSION**

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
  - **Would you rather be able to hear everything said out loud in a one-mile radius or be able to read the thoughts of one person sitting next to you?**

- How can you tell someone is listening to you? How do you know they aren't?
- 🔄 How does it feel when someone isn't listening to you?

### POLL | Have you ever felt like God wasn't listening to you?

- Maybe you've felt like God wasn't listening to you. You might have prayed for something specific that didn't happen, or perhaps your prayer life is non-existent because God doesn't respond how you'd expect.
- **Have you ever felt like God wasn't listening?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Poll the group on the question. Have them respond by moving to a "Yes" side of the room and a "No" side. Allow a few students who feel comfortable to share about what it was like when they felt God wasn't listening and what it was like when God was.
- You're not alone if you have felt like God wasn't listening. There are people here who have felt that in the past and some who feel it now. Talking with God can feel strange because God doesn't stand in front of us as a physical person. It's different from talking with a friend, where we can see facial expressions and body language.
- The Bible is full of stories of people waiting for God to respond. Last week, we shared the story of Abraham and Sarah, who prayed for years and years to have a kid. God eventually answered their prayer, but what do we do in the meantime? What can we do when it feels like God isn't listening or hearing us, and we begin doubting if God is there for us? Let's look at a few stories from the Bible and find out.

### SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

#### SCRIPTURE | 1 Samuel 1:1–8

- In the Old Testament, there's a woman named Hannah. She knew what it was like to pray and feel like God wasn't listening. Let's take a look.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read 1 Samuel 1:1–8.
- Hannah is married to this guy, Elkanah, who has another wife named Peninnah. Having two wives was a common practice, but what's striking here is that Peninnah has kids and Hannah doesn't. This is important for a couple of reasons. First, as we learned last week, kids helped extend a family line. Second, in this culture, having kids was a sign of God's favor and blessing.
- Because she doesn't have kids, her "rival," Peninnah, would make fun of her and provoke her. She was making Hannah feel bad for something out of her control. Can you imagine how that must have felt for Hannah? She must have felt like she was carrying such a weight.

#### SCRIPTURE | 1 Samuel 1:9–17

- She hasn't had a kid yet, hasn't received a sign of God's favor, and she's getting bullied for it. But it doesn't stop there.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** Read 1 Samuel 1:9–17.
- Her burden reaches the point where she's weeping and having difficulty eating. Then, when she goes to pray to God, a priest sees her and accuses her of being drunk! Instead of empathizing with her experience or asking what she's doing, he throws another insult onto the pile.
- All Hannah wanted was a sign that God was still with her. She only wanted someone to listen to her in her pain and doubt. She must have felt so frustrated by everything happening in her life.
  - Maybe that's something you can relate to. You might know what it's like for life to feel heavy, and then one thing someone says makes it even worse.
  - Sometimes, the things we feel in the shadows can cause us to lose ourselves in the pain. We might lash out at others or feel like the only way to escape is to numb ourselves and push people away.
- It's so tough to stay calm and collected in those moments. Even when it felt like *no one* was listening to her,

Hannah still went to God. She waited for God to respond, but that didn't stop her from praying. There was a gap in the response, but Hannah still chose to pray to God and ask God to *surprise* her. Eventually, God surprised her, and she became pregnant with a son named Samuel.

- We might focus on how God answered her prayer, but that's not what's at the center of this story. The central piece of this story is Hannah's faithfulness while she was doubting, even when there wasn't a response. When she couldn't hear God responding, she didn't give up. She chose to keep praying through the silence.

## DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
  - ★ **What's difficult about feeling like God isn't listening to you?**
    - **Have you ever felt similar to Hannah, where it seems like everything is going wrong, and God doesn't seem to be doing anything? What's the most challenging part about being in that situation?**
    - **Why do you think Hannah took her frustration and disappointment to God? Where do you usually go when you feel that way?**

## QUESTION | "What doubts do you think Hannah experienced in the silence?"

- **What doubts do you think Hannah experienced in the silence?**
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Ask the previous question and let a few teenagers share their responses. Highlight answers that help reinforce the teaching below.*
- If I were Hannah, my biggest question would be... "God, why won't you answer me?" When we ask God to hear us, we might expect God to respond in many different ways. We might wish for God to speak to us directly as if suddenly hearing an audible voice from God wouldn't terrify us. We might want God to do something and make a situation disappear.
- But those aren't the only ways God can respond to us.
  - God might speak to us through the Bible. We might read through a story or piece of wisdom directly connected to what we're going through. God might also talk to us through the people around us and the advice, stories, and experiences they're willing to share.
  - We might suddenly feel a sense of peace or be inspired by nature, a podcast, or a song lyric. There are many ways for God to speak to and respond to us. They don't always look like God's response here to Hannah.
  - Sometimes, God responds to us by saying, "Not yet." That is so hard for us to hear and can frustrate us. But, sometimes, we're not ready for what's next and need some extra time to collect ourselves, grow in wisdom, and develop our trust.
- Knowing God doesn't respond to us because we pray faithfully is important. Like it is a reward for doing the right spiritual things. The reason why God answers some prayers and not others is a mystery. I wish I knew the answer! I know that as we pray amid our doubts, God transforms and deepens our faith in ways that don't come by any other means.

## SCRIPTURE | Psalm 138:1–3

- We can still keep the conversation with God going even if we feel like we're only hearing silence. An ancient poet and King named David had a Hannah-like experience and wrote a song about it.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read Psalm 138:1–3.*
- David wrote this poem because he had experienced God's never-ending faithfulness. He's seen God move powerfully in his life, and he wants to remember this moment by giving thanks to God.

- David made many mistakes and had moments where he felt God wasn't listening. But just like Hannah, no matter how close or far off God felt to him, David continued to pray and connect with God.
- He needed help hearing what God was saying. So, he created a habit of staying connected to God even when it seemed hopeless. He trusted that God would answer eventually. It just might take a bit longer or look differently than he expected. We can create a habit of praying through silence and trusting God to hear every word. We can keep sharing our hearts with God because Hannah and David show us that **when it feels like God doesn't hear you, keep praying.**

**NOW WHAT?** *What does God want us to do about it?*

### REFLECTION | The Doubt Board Check-In

- At the start of this series, we created a Doubt Board. It's been a place for us to write down our questions, struggles, frustrations, and the areas we needed to feel some hope. The point wasn't just to document what we were feeling but to give us a landmark to see what God would do throughout this month.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *You need the Doubt Board you have used for the last few weeks for this reflection. Set out some pens or markers for teenagers to write to empathize with the doubts and questions by writing a kind response like "I have that question too" or "I am still waiting for God to answer this my prayer as well." Also, if God has answered a prayer or resolved a doubt they wrote on the board, encourage them to write and update next to it. If you feel anonymity will help people more, provide some foldable sheets of paper for teenagers to write their doubts on and then attach them to the board.*
- We are seeing that **when it feels like God doesn't hear you, keep praying**, and this has been a way to remind us how even when things feel dark, God's light can still break through. Here are a few things we read in Scripture this week that we
  - **NAME WHAT YOU NEED.** When we looked at Hannah's story, we saw her name what she thought she needed. She wasn't afraid to admit how she wanted to see God move in her life. Sometimes, we'll quickly push away the things we need because we don't want to feel like a burden. This week, you can ask God for what you think you need and grow in your faith.
  - **FIND SUPPORT IN COMMUNITY.** Hannah didn't try to make it through her shadows alone. She had her husband with her, who loved her and cared for her. He may not have always understood exactly what she was experiencing, but he supported her when she needed it most. We don't need to carry our doubts alone. This week, be honest about your questions with someone you trust.
  - **PRAY THROUGH IT ALL.** Our struggle to hear God doesn't mean we should stop talking with God. We can lean in and create a habit of opening up to God even if it feels silent. It doesn't always make sense and can feel unnatural, but God invites us to keep connecting. In moments like this, we learned to trust God to hear our prayer, even though his response is always a mystery. This week, even when things seem silent or dark, continue to talk to God.
- Now that this series is coming to a close, let's take a moment to review the things we've written on our Doubt Board over the last few weeks.
- We have walked a journey through the shadows of our doubt and questions for the last few weeks. This is a journey that most likely won't end tonight. It is just the beginning for some of us, but remember, **when it feels like God doesn't hear you, keep praying.**

### DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion and save it for small groups. If you conduct this discussion, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*

- 🔄 How can we keep from making our requests to God from becoming expectations of God?
- Read Ephesians 6:18. How can we as a group support each other to pray no matter what we are going through?
- What's one way you can approach prayer this week not to get what you want but to grow your trust in God?

### MUSIC | "Infinity" (Kings Kaleidoscope)

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** During the following response, play the song "Infinity" (Kings Kaleidoscope), or choose a piece with themes similar to those of an artist you like! But make sure you have purchased any licenses required to do so. Here's [a link](#) to preview the song for your personal use. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)

### RESPONSE | Everyday Prayer Prompts

- Even when we don't know *exactly* what we're looking for. Having a way to remind us to pray and what to pray about can be helpful.
- We can do this by simply connecting our prayers to other everyday things we do. It's one of the simplest ways to build new prayer habits. Here are a few examples:
  - So every time you wash your hands, you could pray, "God, I'm feeling like \_\_\_\_\_ is overwhelming me. Please surprise me with what I need."
  - When you open your fridge or pantry looking for a snack, you might pray, "God, my soul is hungry for \_\_\_\_\_. Help me with what I need."
  - And when you sit down to do your homework, you could pray something like, "God, right now, it's challenging to understand \_\_\_\_\_. Help me understand and know more."
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** For this response, you need the handout [included in this week's series materials](#) and something to write with. Have teenagers spend some time creating some surprise prayer prompts of their own.
- By connecting our prayers with a few simple daily actions, we set ourselves up to stay connected to God no matter what we hear or don't. These habits can help us stay close to God and keep praying even when it feels like we're lost in the shadows.
- When you're full of questions, God is with you. When you have doubts, God is leading you. Like Hannah, keep moving closer to God even when things feel uncertain. **When it feels like God doesn't hear you, keep praying.**