



Ben White

After they had eaten and drunk at Shiloh, Hannah rose and presented herself before the Lord. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. She was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly. She made this vow: 'O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a Nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head.'

As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, 'How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine.' But Hannah answered, 'No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.' Then Eli answered, 'Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him.'

1 Samuel 1:9-17

Have you ever found yourself not knowing what to say when someone cheerily said “How are you?” Perhaps you felt awful, but didn’t like to say so? A friend of mine had this experience once when leaving church. She decided to be honest, and said that she felt terrible. The unheeding reply was “Oh – that’s good!”

There are unwritten expectations about how people should behave, just as there were when Hannah prayed in the Jerusalem temple. Mental ill health makes it difficult or impossible to fulfil them, and our unwillingness to be honest about such things contributes to the stigma. By conferring stigma on those who suffer from mental ill health, or even on those who simply give honest emotional replies to everyday questions, church and society make things worse.

Unlike God, human beings cannot see what is in someone's heart – unless they share them. However, if we ask, we need to be ready for honest answers, and honest answers make vulnerable people more vulnerable. If we join in with God, in searching out one another’s vulnerabilities, we need to get more like him in loving and accepting what we find.

A “Have a Go” habit: Truth time

- Look at [Psalm 139:1](#) “O Lord, you have searched me and known me”. God loves you and really knows you. Read the Psalm, slowly more than once every day for a week.
- Choose one of the things God says about you and stick it next to your bed on a post-it note.
- Whenever you feel misunderstood repeat the truth on a post-it note.



Looking for support?



[What can offer help and support](#)

Next reflection

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The *#FaithAndMentalHealth* reflections were written by Rev Prof Chris Cook. Ruth Rice developed the "Have a go" habits.

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