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Series: *Heroes of Faith*

Title: *Hannah --- A Mother of Faith*

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Scripture: 1st Samuel 1:1-20, 24-28

Amen---thank you Graham for reminding us that in these turbulent pandemic times, we stand on the solid rock of our faith in Jesus!

Speaking of turbulent times, has this COVID-19 thing made you feel hopeless? I think I see a lot of heads nodding.

Has anything else in life ever made you feel that way?

- Perhaps there was a time when a relative or friend was fighting a losing battle over drug or alcohol dependency.
- Maybe there was a time when your child rebelled.
- Have you ever felt hopeless about your finances?

Again, I imagine there are a lot of subtle “Amen’s” being said out there.

I bring this up because this morning as we continue our study of the Heroes of Faith in Hebrews 11, we come to a woman who was familiar with the hopeless feeling I’m talking about; the feeling that things are bad and are only going to get worse.

Her name is Hannah and her example can teach us a lot about how God used hopeless times for our good and His glory.

Let me give you a little background.

Hannah lived at the end of a sad period in the life of Israel known as the age of The Judges. Time prevents me from sharing all the details, but basically, it was a time when, **“Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.”** (Judges 17:6)

Now, when we first meet Hannah, we realize that she is someone who has every reason to feel hopeless. Open your Bibles to 1st Samuel 1:1 and you’ll see what I mean. It says,

“There was a certain man from Ramathim, whose name was Elkanah. He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah.”

Now listen to this next sentence. **“Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.”**

Well, you don’t have to be a certified family counselor to know that Hannah’s was not an ideal situation. Think of it:

- Her husband---whom she loves---has taken a second wife.
- Hannah is barren. She can’t have children.
- But this second wife, Penninnah, can.

Now, polygamy was never God's ideal, but it was common in ancient Israel because, this was the day and age when everyone did what was right in their own eyes. And that "right in their own eyes" perspective not only made polygamy an accepted thing. It also reduced wives to little more than a means of securing children to ensure the family name would carry on. So, a woman unable to have children would feel worthless in that culture.

By the way, this is why I'm preaching from this particular ROOM on our campus. Do you recognize it? Right, I'm in the nursery where all moms come with their babies. Hannah wanted a baby more than anything else she wanted to be able to celebrate what many women are celebrating today, motherhood.

Happy Mother's Day moms!

Now, as I already said Hannah was Elkanah's first wife and she was his true love. But because she was infertile, Elkanah followed in the foolish footsteps of Father Abraham and found a second source of offspring. He got another woman, another wife, to ensure his name wouldn't be snuffed out. And with Peninnah's help it wasn't. I mean she was a baby factory! Every time she turned around she was having another child.

Think of that from Hannah's perspective. It was bad enough to have to share her husband with another woman, but to have to stand by and watch that woman pop out babies year after year had to be unbearable for her. I can just see Peninnah doting on her children with a smirk and saying, *"Oh Hannah, I know how hard it is that you haven't been able to have children. But really dear, it's a blessing in disguise. I mean, after all, I have so many. Why when we go to tabernacle---they fill all the beds in the nursery!"*

Well, for Hannah there was a time of the year that moms and their families usually looked forward to, but not Hannah. She dreaded it. I'm referring to the annual family road trip to Shiloh. Elkanah would go there yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord. This was supposed to be a celebration, sort of a family vacation, but it had to be torture for Hannah.

Imagine having to walk ten miles with your husband's other wife who never stops with her subtle jabs. Meanwhile, her children bump into you, wipe their noses on your skirt, and whine until you carry them. Imagine the joy those children brought Elkanah. No wonder when Hannah arrived in Shiloh she felt even more hopeless.

The custom of the Jews who went to this celebration was that part of the sacrifice would go to the priest and part would be eaten by the family in the presence of God. It was supposed to be a time of rejoicing, sort of a huge church picnic on the grounds.

But when you're hopeless, times that are to be the best times can be the most painful. Look at verses 4 and 5. ***"When the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and her daughters---but to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, but the Lord had closed her womb."***

Wives, would an extra lamb chop make you feel better in that situation? Of course not! And what's worse is Peninnah wouldn't keep quiet even in this place of worship. The Scripture says that Hannah's rival ***"...kept provoking her to irritate her."*** She found a thousand ways to remind Hannah of her barrenness. She taunted her and mocked her constantly.

But the most difficult thing that Hannah faced had to be what it says in those last six words in verse 5: ***“the Lord had closed her womb.”*** This is one of the hardest things to accept: our times of hopelessness—difficult as they may be, are ordained or allowed by the Lord Himself. We can’t help but wonder WHY God allows us to go through these times. But He does. He is in charge of the circumstances of our lives. It was God who made Hannah a woman. He put within her the hunger to have a child. But as we are told twice in our text, God was also involved in her infertility.

In my mind, this explains part of why, as the Scripture says, Hanna, ***“wept bitterly.”*** I can’t help but think of the story of Ruth where we read of Naomi’s bitterness toward God in her own hopeless situation.

Then when things got really bad, Elkanah stepped in and in typical male fashion, once again tried to fix things. In verse 8, he said, ***“Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not better to you than ten sons?”***

Listen men. Let’s learn from Elkanah’s mistake here. Sometimes our wives don’t want to have their problems fixed, as much as they just want to be heard.

Okay, Why does God allow us to go through hopeless times like this? We don’t know all the answers, but with the help of God’s Word we do know some, so here goes.

(1) God knows that hopelessness often DRIVES us to PRAY.

Many times, the only thing that motivates us to turn to God, is when in our despair, we realize we have nowhere else to turn. God knows we NEED Him and so there are times when He allows pandemics and sorrows to come OUR way, so we’ll turn HIS way.

And this is how it worked out in Hannah’s case. The Bible says that one year on this annual journey, after eating and drinking in Shiloh Hannah rose from her seat, leaving her food untouched, and went to pray.

In her prayer she made a vow and said, ***“O Lord of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant---but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life.”*** (verses 9-11)

Understand, Hannah was deeply distressed. She was beside herself in hopeless sorrow, weeping bitterly, and at that point she realized what she needed to do was to go to God.

Look at verse 13. ***“Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard.”*** In other words, she wasn’t talking to be heard by men. She wasn’t doing like the hypocrites Jesus described in Matthew 8, those guys who, ***“love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others.”*** No, she was talking to God from the depths of her heart.

But her silent, private prayer caused Eli, the chief priest at Shiloh, to think she was drunk. You see prayer, in that day was almost always an audible thing. Psalm 3:4 expresses this thinking when it says, ***“To the LORD I cry ALOUD!”***

So, Eli rebuked her. How is that for pastoral compassion! Poor Hannah!

- First, she has to deal with Peninnah’s jibes.
- Then she has to bear her husband’s bumbling effort to comfort her.
- And here she has to deal with a spiritual leader who misjudges her broken heart and says to her, ***“Go home and sober up!”***

I wouldn't blame her if she decided to move her membership to another tabernacle!

But Hannah wasn't like that. In a very respectful, humble way she said and I paraphrased this a little: ***"No, my lord, I am a woman oppressed in spirit; I have not poured myself a drink of wine or strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord."*** (verse 15)

Well, Eli saw she was sincere and realizing his error said, ***"Go in peace; and may the God of Israel grant your petition that you have asked of Him."*** (vs 17) That's what Hannah did. She, ***"went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad."*** (vs 18) As we used to sing, she ***"took her burden to the Lord---and left it there."***

Hannah experienced relief from her hopelessness by going to God, the Source of all HOPE. She shared her burden with God and experienced the LIFTING of that burden.

This is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 11 when He said, ***"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."***

Listen, no matter HOW hopeless we feel, going to God ALWAYS helps. Being in His loving, all-powerful presence can ONLY help. So, like a child who has skinned his knee, what we need to do, first and foremost when we feel hopeless is to go to our Heavenly Father. God always WELCOMES us into His presence. He ALWAYS helps us.

I'm reminded of the story of a 911 call-taker named Antonia Bundy. One night her caller had an unusual request. A young boy was on the line and he said, ***"I called because I had a bad day at school."*** Nine times out of ten, such an admission would be met with a scolding for wasting police resources. But Bundy sensed that was not the right response. She said, ***"I asked him what was troubling him And he told me that he had homework, and at that point, I was able to determine that it was more of a 'I need help with homework' than an actual emergency."***

Fortunately, Bundy was cheerfully up-to-the-task. She said, ***"I've always been good at math. All the way through high school I enjoyed it. So it was something I was very happy I could help him with."*** Bundy walked him through an arithmetic problem, calling it a nice break in her busy day. As they ended their call the boy said, ***"I'm sorry for calling you, but I really needed help."*** Bundy said, ***"You're fine. We're always here to help."***

Well, God is always there to help us. He waits for us to call. As 1st Peter 5:7 says, we can, ***"Cast all our anxiety on Him because He cares for us."*** And, you don't have to be selective about what you bring to God. Bring to him whatever your heart aches about. Everything from homework to broken homes. Bring it all because you matter to Him. There is nothing too small or too big for Him to deal with.

Learning the blessing of time alone with God---that's a lesson that hopeless times can teach us. But our Heavenly Father also knows that...

(2) Times of hopelessness can DEEPEN our FAITH.

Now, at first glance it seems as if Hannah is bargaining with God with her prayer. ***"If you give me what I want--a SON---I'll give Him back to you."*** But that's not it; no, you see, Hannah's time with God helped her faith in Him to grow.

With her prayer-inspired vow she was revealing her newfound realization that anything she had; even a child, belonged not to her, but to God.

Here's another indication of her spiritual growth in all this. The answer to Hannah's prayer (the birth of her son) was not what brought her out of her hopelessness.

Did you notice that?

It's not like she was desperate and depressed and then she prayed, and then God answered her prayer and she became happy. No. Look at verse 18. After Eli prayed for God to grant her petition, it says, ***"And she went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad."***

Before this encounter she wouldn't eat, but now she eats; she joins the celebration. Before this encounter she wept bitterly and her heart was sad, but not anymore. It's like the whole matter was settled in that moment. And all of this happened before her prayer was answered. Why? It's another consequence of time in God's presence.

You see, when we are WITH God, we begin to better UNDERSTAND WHO GOD IS. We begin to realize how much He really does care for us. We begin to see that He is BIGGER than our problems, and that He knows infinitely more than we do, and that He is supremely good, and all that steadies us.

I'm reminded of a phrase in one of Robert Browning's poems: *"tis looking downward that makes one dizzy."* That's the way it works in life, focusing downward, focusing on our troubles has that affect, but when we look up at God, our perspective gets infinitely better. When our faith deepens such that we see our problems from the perspective of God's greatness and love---the "dizziness" goes away.

Later on in chapter 2, when Hannah sang a song of praise, she looked up and said, ***"There is no one holy like the Lord nor is there any rock like our God for the Lord is a God of knowledge"*** (1 Samuel 2:2-3). Through prayer, she looked up and saw a God she could trust. And He hasn't changed. There is still is no one holy like the Lord, nor is there any rock like our God.

Hannah also learned something about the way God works. In that same song she said, ***"The bows of the mighty are shattered, but the feeble gird on strength"*** (2:4). In other words, she learned that God's power is demonstrated in our weakness. God wanted her to see how helpless she was without Him, like the song Graham sang. He is the SOLID rock, everything else is sinking sand.

And, in the years to come, Hannah's faith in God was verified. She saw God work in her hopeless situation. She did become pregnant and had a son named Samuel. When he was weaned; which in her day and age would have been when he was anywhere from three to six years old, she fulfilled her vow and did what must have been a very painful thing. She brought Samuel back to the tabernacle at Shiloh to dedicate him to the Lord. She left him with Eli to raise as a priest.

By the way she ended up having 5 more children---I bet that shut Penninah up!

Plus, SAMUEL wasn't just any kid. No, he grew up to become one of the most influential leaders in all of Israel's history. Under his leadership Israel renounced idolatry and shook off the yoke of the Philistines. Samuel became the spiritual advisor and mentor to the first two kings of Israel.

Let's pray.