

The Problem of Pain

1 Samuel 1:15 ““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.”

Welcome to **Week 3** of “**What She Said**,” a 5 week look at meaningful moments of women in the Bible, anchoring on things they said that defined their lives and changed history. Today we are looking at the story of Hannah found in 1st Samuel Ch. 1. Hannah is a portrait of pain, of longing, and of faithfulness. Being in a place of pain is something we can all relate to. Whether it is something that’s missing in our lives, something that’s hurtful, or something that just breaks our heart. We have all experienced pain in one form or another. But the real question is, **Will we let the pain debilitate us and destroy our lives or will we find healing and restoration in the arms of God?** Sometimes life puts us into situations where we have no other choice but to keep on moving. And it feels like we just need to push through and push on. But if we never process our pain in a healthy and healing way, it can lead to our emotional and spiritual undoing. Hannah is a great example of how to properly process our pain and to discover healing and purpose in the presence of God. Let’s look a little bit deeper at her story, but before we do, let’s invite God into this moment through PRAYER as we prepare to take a look at His word.

1 Samuel 1:1-2 (NIV) 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. **2** He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

As we unpack the situation that led to Hannah’s pain and we begin to examine how it is she went about dealing with it, I want us to observe some of the DO’s and DONT’s that we need to be mindful of when it comes to pain, whether we are the one experiencing the pain or whether we are the one trying to minister to the one in pain, so that in the end we can experience the healing that God wants to ultimately bring into our lives.

Right off the bat we see the first DO when it comes to dealing with our pain and that is

ACKNOWLEDGE THE PAIN

Vs. 2 is a painful way to start out the story but it is an acknowledgment of the problem. Being married to two people at the same time sounds like automatic trouble to me (and we think we have relationship issues), but when one wife has children and the other doesn’t, there’s a bitterness, insecurity and jealousy that comes in like a wrecking ball. We saw it with Sarah and Hagar in Genesis regarding the story of Abraham and we can see it playing out over and over in the scriptures. Even when another spouse isn’t involved there is a pain and aching that comes with wanting to have children and not being able to. But the worst thing that could happen for Hannah is to ignore her pain and the issue that has led to this place. We don’t know all of the ends and outs of this relationship and the conversations that have led us to this moment. Maybe there was a time where Hannah had ignored her pain and just pressed on. Maybe she just put her head down and soldiered on for a season. Maybe she tried to bring it to her husband’s

attention several times before but he just didn't have ears to hear. One thing is for certain, that doesn't make the hurt go away. If we are ever going to find healing we have to ACKNOWLEDGE there is a problem. Whatever Hannah's approach has been in the past, it is very clear that she is ready to acknowledge there is a problem and scripture states what the problem is right here in vs.2.

1 Samuel 1:3-5 (NIV) 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. **4** 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. **5** But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb.

It was practice during sacrifices at that time to share portions of the animal sacrificed with the family and the priests, truly a "Taste and see the lord is good" situation. So Elkanah giving a portion to Peninnah and her children was a normal practice. Also, pointing out, scripture says "all her sons and daughters." This wasn't just one child that Hannah would feel jealousy or insecurity over, but multiple children. Elkanah was not a cruel or hard man when it came to Hannah though. Recognizing his wife's pain he tried to compensate for it by giving her a double portion. This leads us to our first DON'T when it comes to dealing with pain:

DON'T attempt to FILL THE VOID caused by pain with other things

Elkanah knew this was hard on her. He knew this was painful for her, so he went out of his way to show her extra mercy and extra kindness. We men can be notorious for trying to fix something broken. The problem is, we cannot do that in the lives of our wives when it comes to their hearts. In fact, our wives don't want us to try and fix their broken heart they just want us to be there to help comfort them when it is. Think about it, Hannah's broken heart isn't the kind of pain you can patch over with extra steak. Some good food can do wonders for our emotional well being, but the longing she had was far beyond that. The phrase "The Lord had closed her womb," isn't intended as a statement that God was being malicious or was punishing her, but rather just a statement regarding the fact that she hadn't been able to have a child yet, God meant no malice in the moment, but other people did. Sometimes people will see our pain and want to stoke it to make themselves feel better, unfortunately, that was the case with Hannah's spousal competition which leads us to a second DON'T when it comes to dealing with or caring for those who are in pain and that is this:

DON'T PROVOKE one's PAIN and thus cause even more pain

1 Samuel 1:6-8 (NIV) **6** Because the LORD had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. **7** This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat.

Peninnah enjoyed seeing Hannah suffer, her infliction was intentional, but Elkanah could do as much damage by discounting her pain, even with good intentions.

8 Her husband Elkanah would say to her, “Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don’t you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?”

Elkanah discounted Hannah’s pain, saying you don’t need more, you’ve got me! A spouse isn’t a substitute for a child or parenting. Those aren’t voids that can be filled by each other. This is a classic sympathy vs empathy situation. Empathy understands and has compassion from the hurting’s perspective, while sympathy comes across as pity and understanding but only from your own point of view. This was a common phrase of the time though, we heard women tell Naomi that Ruth was worth more than 7 sons, but that doesn’t make the pain any lessened. That was a hard situation for Hannah to be in, it seemed as if she was in for a lifetime of pity from her husband and a lifetime of provocation from her rival.

DO #1 - ACKNOWLEDGE THE PAIN

DON’T #1 - DON’T FILL THE VOID caused by pain with other things.

DON’T #2 - DON’T PROVOKE one’s PAIN and thus cause more pain

Hannah’s pain was her reality, but her response to that pain would be something that would change her circumstances forever.

1 Samuel 1:9-10 (NIV) 9 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. **10** In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly.

And that leads us to our second DO when it comes to our pain: **Take the PAIN TO GOD**

In the midst of her pain, she turned to God. She didn’t wait till her pain was gone to come to the Lord. She didn’t wait till she had the right attitude or could fix her face. She brought these prayers in the midst of her anguish all while weeping bitterly. Her pain was still there, but she brought it to God. She didn’t shut down or turn from him, but brought her broken heart before Him. Some of us are at places in our lives because we got to this point of heartbreak and instead of bringing our broken mess to God, we turned away from Him in bitterness. Let me encourage you.

Psalms 34:17-20 (NIV) 17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. **18** The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. **19** The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; **20** he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.

Matthew 5:4 (NIV) Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

You are only a step away from being close to God. Not that you have to pretend you are okay. Not that you have to pretend like the pain isn’t real, just draw near to Him. He can handle all the pain you are holding.

1 Samuel 1:11 (NIV) 11 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.”

Hannah made this prayer and promise to God. She made this vow that if God were to give her the child she desired, she would give him right back to God. These were not empty words based on a pledge, but this really was the desire of her heart because she literally gave him to the temple to serve even as a little child. She begged and bargained, but she trusted God in the process. Hannah’s story has a happy outcome, but not all of our stories have the outcome we desire. We don’t all get that miracle. We don’t all get what we plead for. So here’s what we need to understand about bringing our pain to God.

God is still good if our pain remains. God is still good if we don’t get what we want. If our view of God changes based on what He does for us, we don’t have faith in Him, we’re just trying to manipulate our creator into submitting to us.

That leads us to our final DON’T when it comes to dealing with pain. **DON’T be oblivious regarding the IMPACT of PAIN**

1 Samuel 1:12-14 (NIV) 12 As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. **13** Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk **14** and said to her, “How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.”

Eli did not know how to read the room. Eli wasn’t able to look at this situation and see what was happening with these people. Eli was missing the fact this woman was heartbroken and having a come to God moment. Eli was focused on what was in front of him, the food, the wine, etc. This man’s entire job was to be a spiritual intercessor and advocate for these people, and instead he slammed her for being drunk. Everyone is not always going to be able to see your pain clearly or respond to it appropriately. That goes for priests then, and pastors now. I can say confidently that even the most intentional and empathetic christian can be oblivious to what is going on in someone’s life. Just make sure you are making an effort to actually be aware of those around you, consider their feelings, actions, and take into account you have no idea of all they’ve gone through. On the same breath though, be patient and forgiving with those who don’t see your pain. Help them to see it so that their obliviousness doesn’t become another source of pain for you. Give them the chance to correct and care.

1 Samuel 1:15-18 (NIV) 15 “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. **16** Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.” **17** Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.” **18** 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.

Just want to point out this phrase here, then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. When Elkanah tried to placate her pain with extra food, it was useless. When Peninnah pushed her to the point she couldn't eat, it wasn't helpful either. But when she finally went before the lord with her problems, when she sought after his provision and peace, she could eat and be well. The food couldn't solve the soul pain, but it could comfort the heart that trusted God. There are many of us that are trying to solve our pain with small comforts. For some it may be food, or it could be fitness. For some it's success and popularity. For some it's purpose and accomplishing things. For some it's relationships. But understand this

No comfort in this world can do what the peace of God can.

1 Samuel 1:19-20 (NIV)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. **20** So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the LORD for him."

She named her child "Because I asked the Lord for Him." She gave this child a name to be a clear reminder of the acknowledgement this occurred because she turned to God with her pain. And this leads us to our final DO when it comes to dealing with pain:

Recognize WHERE your HEALING COMES FROM

1 Samuel 1:21-28 (NIV)21 When her husband Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vow, **22** Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the LORD, and he will live there always."

23 "Do what seems best to you," her husband Elkanah told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his word." So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

24 After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. **25** When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, **26** and she said to him, "Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. **27** I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. **28** So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

Samuel wasn't the source of her healing, God was. She wanted that child. She wanted to be a mother. She wanted to have that joy and pain. It wasn't about competing with Peninnah or earning the favor of Elkanah. She took her pain to God, and He brought her healing. But Samuel was the messenger of healing, not the healing itself. She pledged to give her child back to God, virtually leaving her in place she started, but knowing that God had cared for her. Many of us we find temporary fixes in this life and cling to them rather than God. I'm healed of my pain

as long as my marriage is going well. I'm healed of my pain as long as my job is secure. I'm healed of my pain as long as everyone loves me. I'm healed of my pain as long as my hairline doesn't recede any further. Healing isn't conditional.

If you have to hold on to something other than God to be healed of your pain, you aren't actually healed, you're just distracted.

Hannah's pain led her to the Lord and she was blessed. Samuel would go on to not only be a man of God but to lead and direct Israel. Samuel would lead and direct King Saul, the first king of Israel. He would be the one to anoint David as the second king. He's the one who God spoke the famous phrase to

1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV) But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Just as God would tell Samuel, He looks at the Heart. He looked at Hannah's heart, saw her pain, heard and answered her prayer. Hannah was a model of not only what to do with our pain, but also, what to do with our healing.

Invitation:

How are you responding to the pain in your life today?

Romans 8:26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

How are you responding to the pain in other's lives?

I don't know about you, but my prayer is that God would use me as a healing balm in the lives of others. I sure don't want to be the cause of their pain and I sure don't want to add to it either.

So let's

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DO #2 - Take OUR PAIN to GOD

DO #3 - Recognize WHERE our HEALING COMES FROM

DON'T #1 - DON'T FILL THE VOID caused by pain with other things.

DON'T #2 - DON'T PROVOKE one's PAIN and thus cause more pain

DON'T #3 - DON'T be oblivious regarding the IMPACT of PAIN