

LIFE LESSONS FROM OT WOMEN: HANNAH

All we know about Hannah comes from Ch 1 and 2 of 1 Samuel. No other references.

Over view. The Jews had come into the promised land under the leadership of Moses and then Joshua. Then they went through a period of rebellion against God, God would bring judgement, normally of oppression by their enemies, then repentance, then a leader would rise up to deliver them then the cycle would repeat itself. The Book of Judges is this period and ends with this depressing line. The people had no king and did what seemed right in their own eyes. The next book Ruth is in the time of judges and so follows Judges, but 1 Samuel really follows directly from Judges.

Read 1 Samuel 1:1–1 Samuel 2

A Woman of deep pain Jewish sources say she had been childless for 19 years. There was a Deep shame in this in the ancient world. Your role as a woman was defined by being a wife and a mother. In Jewish society this was seen as your key purpose in life. If you had no children, there was no one to carry on your family line and you were forgotten for future generations. You had no one to care for you in your old age when husband died. If you had no children, you were not blessed by God. Some-how maybe you had done something wrong. You would have been seen as less than by other women.

If you did not produced a child after 10 years, then your husband was free to take a second wife. And it would have been the first's wife job to find such a woman. Not told but by the order of names it is suggested that Hannah is the first wife. Peninnah the second. She suffered the pain of being bullied by someone that she has had to bring into the home and of seeing someone else sleeping with your husband. If she married 18 she would now be 37 and feeling deperate.

She had the pain of not being understood by her husband. V8 Elkanah is trying to comfort Hannah, but his response suggests that maybe he doesn't really get it. He can't make up for her pain, no matter how much he loves her.

Note. V5. Might have been surprised by the translation. Other version say that when Elkanah was dividing up the sacrifice he gave a double portion to Hannah because he loved her. More recent translations says he gave her one as she had no children to share it with. The Hebrew is not clear. But it is clearly saying that Elkanah did love Hannah.

She had the pain of being misunderstood by the religious leadership. Eli, high priest accused her of being drunk. To be in deep pain, and instead of offering hope to be accused of being drunk is pretty insulting. She had the pain of year after year seeing your dream not come to reality and slowly losing your sense of identity. The anger at feeling misunderstood and even betrayed by God. The pain of feeling worthless in the eyes of society.

I think we all carry pain in some way. Some of you are carrying the pain of abuse, broken marriages, some of you

are carrying the pain of miscarriage, and infertility. Some of you are carrying the pain of disability, yourselves, children. Some of you know that pain of being misunderstood spiritual abuse by leaders Pain of suicide in your family. Pain of tragedy. Work place bullying. Many of you keep the pain hidden. Seems as if you can't share it in church community. You see people who seem to have lives together. Who are seeing God answer their prayers. Who seem to have happy families and well behaved kids who love God. You just feel this sense of failure. Of being worthless. Of being unloved by God. Some of you have carried your pain not just for 1 year or 2 but for many many years. Pleaded with God to remove it, change things. Nothing happens.

Why are we shown stories in the Bible like Hannah's. God wants you to know that he sees your pain. I know the danger of this story. Particularly if you are in pain at the moment. You Say. Well, it all turned out all right for her in the end didn't it. She had Samuel, then 3 more sons, 2 daughters. But take encouragement in the fact that your pain is seen by God. Not alone in it. God allowed these stories to be in the Bible so that you know that you are not alone. While there might not be any fairytale ending like Hannah had, God sees and hears your pain.

One of the things we see here from Hannah is she expressed to God that pain. Emotions. Bitterness. She did not bottle it up. Expressed it to God.

Woman of determined faithfulness Hangs in there with God year in year out. 19 years she has been going up the tabernacle bringing her worship. I am sure part of her at times did not want to go, and me reminded she was not blessed like others. She hangs in with God. Sure she weeps bitterly. She pleads. She bargains. But she does not give up on God. She doesn't lash out at Peninnah or husband when she is misunderstood, or bullied. Often part of our hearts just wants to lash out. To get even. Say nasty stuff back. Because that is human nature. I am making an assumptions here but she seems she stayed faithful in spite of what people did.

She keeps praying to God 19 years is a long time to pray one prayer. But it seems she does not give up praying to God. You have to admire her faithfulness in prayer. She will not let go of God in prayer. She keeps her promise to God. How hard as a Mum would it have been to leave your first born at the temple. Only seeing him maybe 3-4 times a year when the family travelled. She keeps caring for her son, looking after his practical needs.

This is someone who carries deep pain and yet is faithful in the midst of it. Easy to be faithful in the good times. Hard to be faithful to God when you are being persecuted. Hard to be faithful to God when everything has gone wrong. Hard to hang in with God can't see him or feel him.



Woman of defiant trust. She is Defiant in the midst of huge odds. Despite her being near the end of child bearing years, she trusts God and the word of Eli. It's hard to know if Eli is being prophetic when he blesses here. But she goes home with her heart restored.

Hannah's prayer (ch 2) is a remarkable prayer of trust in the sovereignty of God. She praises God for her answered prayer. She says God can reverse the fortunes of people and so should lead us to humility. It is God that brings life and death. God who raises people up and brings them down. God will protect his faithful ones. God will come against those who fight against him. Ends with what some say is a prophetic hint of the Jesus Christ. "He gives power to his kings, he increases the strength of his anointed one."

But the most remarkable act of trust is giving her son to Eli to raise. Samuel would have been 3 maybe 4 max when she brings him to the temple. She tells Eli that she is giving him to the Lord and he will belong to the Lord for his whole life. What is remarkable about this, is she has to give him to Eli to raise. I am sure she spent the first 3 years of his life she poured everything she could into Samuel, in instructing him in the Lord. But she would have known that Eli was not exactly a great father figure for Samuel. The country was in a spiritual mess. The temple that he oversaw was corrupt. Eli's sons were robbing people of their sacrifice. They were using their position in the temple to sexually abuse the young women who worked there. So this was not a great environment she was leaving her son in. Eli was a weak leader, and father figure. No doubt he loved God, but he was not an inspiring man. All of this would not have been a secret to the people of Israel. They knew what was happening. So that means Hannah knew.

She had made this promise to God but it would have been very easy for her to say. I am not leaving my son in this place. Rotten to the core. I don't want Eli's sons to be mentoring my son. So there was a defiant trust here in God that he would work in her son's life. Through the flawed figure of Eli. That God would protect her son from the influence of Eli's sons. That God would raise up her son to be a leader in the nation of Israel. And of course that is what Samuel becomes. A godly prophet/ priest figure for the nation of Israel.

It's really hard to trust God when the circumstances don't look good. It's hard to see how God could use the institutional church when it seems so flawed. It's hard to trust God when everything seems to be going wrong. Hannah models a defiant trust that says Yes, I see what is happening around me, but I am going to trust that God will work out his purposes in this situation.

Maybe you can identify with the pain that she knew. It might be very real for you at the moment. Or it might be buried somewhere deep. Scarred to let it out. Scarred it will overwhelm you if you even acknowledge it is there. Maybe like Hannah you struggle to give voice to that pain. Trying to express it to God is really hard.

I want you to know that God has put this story in the Bible for you. So you know that not alone. You are seen. You are heard.

Maybe you feel God speaking to you about being determinedly faithful. You want to give up. Maybe you have not been faithful. God is calling you back to faithfulness. Keep turning up to church even though you want to run a mile. Keep pressing into God. Bible reading, prayer, even though it feels like he has deserted you. Keep doing what he commands no matter how hard it is.

Maybe you can learn from the defiant trust that Hannah had. Defiance that believes the God is sovereign and God will work out his purposes. In your life and in the life of those you love. It is a trust that says. I trust in the character of God more than I trust in the circumstances I see around.

May Hannah's life inspire us this morning. 3000 years ago someone grappled with the circumstances of life that caused deep pain, yet was able to remain faithful and defiantly trust him.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

Why is Hannah's story in the Bible?

Where are the areas of pain in your life? What scars are you carrying from your childhood, traumatic events, or from people?

What can make church an unsafe place to be honest about what is really going on for us? How do we create a culture that accepts pain and failure?

How could Hannah have reacted to the circumstances of her life? What are some unhealthy ways we deal with pain?

What areas is God challenging you to be faithful in? What is pulling you away from being faithful?

When does trust simply become a delusion? I.e. believing God for a miraculous healing. What does a genuine defiant trust in God look like? How can you cultivate it?

What is God showing you through Hannah's life?



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