

INTRO: Sometimes we look at our lives and we ask, Does God even care? Does he care that I am so sad? Does he care that I've gotten my feelings hurt so badly that I'm not even sure I want to keep trying at life? I'm so frustrated with the world I live in, so boxed-in. I feel misunderstood, mistreated, patronized in my pain. I feel picked on, and I feel forgotten. Does God even see me? Does he care that there's so much personal hurt and injustice in the world? Would he even take notice of me, out of this great sea of humanity, out here in a sea of suburban houses and apartments. After all, I'm just like everyone else. Nothing special. In fact, I can't even do lots of things that many others can do. I'm not important or special. I'm not really that good at anything. And what's worse, I'm so beside myself with grief over my own personal hurts, I can't imagine ever getting over it and becoming someone God would use. And as Christians, we might even ask, does God care about the state of his churches? After all, so many of them seem to be doing only what's right in their own eyes. Corrupt leaders. Apostate pastors. Scandals. **Does God care?** This is the kind of question God answers not simply with a sentence, but with a story. Turn with me in your Bibles if you will to 1Sam 1. The year was about 1050BC. It was during the late period for the Judges, after Samson, after Micah and his Levite, After the Levite and his concubine. These were dark days in Israel. Civil war, false worship, corrupt leadership. And the place is a small town in the hill country of Judea—the middle of nowhere. Does God care? Well now, *There was a certain man...*

1. THE STORY

The Setting (1Sam 1:1-2 Obscurity)

"There was a certain man..." That's how Judges 13:2 started about Samson. It's how Judges 17:1 started about Micah and the Levite. It's how Judges 19:1 started about the Levite and his concubine. Those last two ended very badly, and they were narratives that represented how bad it had gotten in Israel without a king. Everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes. Now we get another individual story of a private citizen that represents Israel's national situation as God's people. This guy is from a town you can't pronounce, in a location we're not sure we can identify, out in the hill country, middle of nowhere. His town is obscure. His relatives are obscure. He himself is obscure. His immediate family is obscure. They appear totally irrelevant, insignificant. I used to live in eastern North Carolina and there was town over there—I kid you not—called Tick Bite. I always wanted to steal that sign. Tick Bite—that way, over there. Way over there; and don't forget the bug spray. Ramathaim-zophim.

Continuity. The one thing about Elkanah that might sound remotely recognizable is that he was an Ephrathite. Elimelech and Naomi were Ephrathites in Ruth 1, from Bethlehem in Judah. And not too long from now we'll read in 1Sam 17:12 David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah named Jesse.... Ah, but we digress (Micah 5:2 Bethlehem Ephratha; so also Woodhouse).

Duplicity. *He had two wives...* Uh-oh. When a guy had two wives in the OT, he usually had problems. Just because it's recorded, doesn't mean it's recommended.¹ *The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.* Hannah was not just one wife of two; she was the first wife. In those days, you took a second wife because the first one failed to produce an heir. And sure enough, *"Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children."* Elkanah marries Peninnah because Hannah is barren. And it worked. Peninnah had multiple children, while Hannah remained barren. What do you think that did to the domestic dynamic? We're about to see.

¹ Every time the bible records polygamy, it recommends against it by the telling of the story. Sarah and Hagar. Leah and Rachel. David and his concubines. Solomon and his concubines. Polygamy always creates jealousy, rivalry, division.
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The Sad Situation (1:3-8)

We quickly discover that Elkanah is relatively godly, and Hannah is still the love of his life. *“Now this man used to go up year by year from his city to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh, where the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord. On the day when Elkanah sacrificed he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the Lord had closed her womb. And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat.”*

Elkanah tries to set a godly rhythm and tone for the family. Every year, just as God commanded in the law, he takes the whole family to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of hosts at Shiloh, where God had chosen for his name to dwell. That’s where they set up the tabernacle. That was the only accepted place for sacrificial worship. So that’s where Elkanah leads his family, every year, for the feasts and sacrifices. That was where Eli’s sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests to the Lord. Now we learn later that Hophni and Phinehas are totally corrupt. They sleep with the female servants of the tabernacle, and they take all the best meat of the animal sacrifices for themselves, even the fat that was supposed to be reserved for God alone. So here this obscure but devout “blended” family comes up year after year to go to the equivalent of a bad church with corrupt pastors. At least these parishioners genuinely want to obey God’s law. The priests aren’t even interested in being good people.

Verses 4-7 shows you the typical situation at Shiloh for Elkanah and the family. Elkanah would make the sacrifice, they’d worship together as a family, then they’d all sit down around the table to eat. And that’s where it got ugly. Think about it. Elkanah would serve Peninnah and AALLL her multiple sons and daughters. There Peninnah sits, in all her maternal glory, with at least two sons and two daughters with her, maybe more—4-8 kids, all around the same table as Hannah. Peninnah and her kids get all this meat, which was rare to eat in the ANE. Then Elkanah comes to serve Hannah. Now it’s unclear what he does here. The Hebrew phrase is hard to figure, because it’s a metaphor, a word picture, that can mean “one set of nostrils” or “a double”. Even the Hebrew dictionary itself isn’t quite sure how to translate what the ESV calls “double” here. But the Greek translation has “one portion.” The English translations are divided.² The commentators are divided. So I don’t know what to make of it. But whatever Elkanah does here, it’s either because he loves Hannah, or even though he loves Hannah. No matter what’s going on here, Hannah is Elkanah’s first love, even if she never has kids. But there’s a clear disparity in Hannah’s food. If she has more, it’s not helping her feel any better, because she has no children to help her eat the extra. If she has less, it’s making her feel worse, because she doesn’t have children to feed this year, any more than she had last year, or the year before that, or the year before that. Elkanah loves her all the same, but his love can’t change the fact that *“the Lord had closed her womb,”* and he had kept it closed for at least 4 years, one for every one of Peninnah’s kids, who numbered 4 at minimum. (Hannah herself would eventually have six in all according to 2:21, 4 boys, 2 girls.)

To make it worse, Peninnah liked to rub it in whenever she could. Look there in v.6 *“And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the Lord, she used to provoke her.”* Twice it’s mentioned the Lord closed her womb, and twice it’s mentioned that her rival provoked her. It’s not hard to imagine the

² ESV Double portion and a causative, lit. “two noses/nostrils”; so also NASB, NIV, CSB w/fn “or one”, HALOT “double?” “One portion” and a concessive LXX *meri,da mi,an*, NJB, DOUAY, CEB,
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scene. “You sure don’t have much on your plate over there, Hannah. Well, I guess it IS JUST YOU on that side of the table.” Or, “Wow Hannah, looks like you’ve got more meat than you can eat over there. Too bad you don’t have any kids to help you scarf it down. Mind if my ‘lil Jehoram takes some of that? Of all mommy’s kids, he’s my best eater...!” Mean girl comments, just to get under her skin. Four years, five years, six years, seven years. Hannah was there for every baby shower, every delivery, every birthday, every family worship in Shiloh. To be a woman in the ANE, the first wife who’s barren so that your husband takes another wife who immediately bears him multiple sons and daughters, and there you are, still living in that home, year, after year, after bitter year. That is the worst life outcome you could imagine. And this year, the cumulative effect finally broke her, and it cracked her painted smile.

Therefore, Hannah wept and would not eat. “*And Elkanah, her husband said to her, ‘Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?’*” Ah, the misguided words of a well-intentioned husband only make it worse. “*After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose.*” She sits there all the way through the meal; she waits until everyone else is done eating. Then “*Hannah rose. 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.*” Weeping bitterly is not an everyday thing. She’s crying hard. “And she vowed a vow and said, ‘O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head.’” She feels forgotten by God, but she’s also praying to the very God who she feels has forgotten her. She wants God’s attention, and she’s humble. She views herself the Lord’s servant, that’s all. She asks for one son, and if God will give him to her, she will give him back to the Lord, most likely as a lifelong Nazirite according to Numbers 6. No haircuts, no grapes, no wine—total devotion to God, growing up and living right there in Shiloh at the Tabernacle, away from Ramathaim Zophim.

We pick it up in v.12. “*As she continued praying before the Lord, Eli observed her mouth Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli took her to be a drunken woman.*” That gives you a window into the worship culture at Shiloh and also Eli’s spiritual blindness. When Eli looks at a woman praying, he thinks “Here we go again, another drunk muttering nonsense under his breath.” That’s pastoral malpractice. Hannah’s grief is not only prolonged. It’s lonely. Her own husband makes light of her grief, and now the priest accuses her of being drunk. Neither of the men in her life understand her grief as they should. “*And Eli said to her, ‘How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you.’ But Hannah answered, ‘No, my Lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord.’*” You see her play on words? I’m not guzzling down wine. I’m pouring out my grief. “*Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation.*”

And Eli’s blessing in v.17 comes off as nothing more than perfunctory, almost as if to move Hannah along. “*Then Eli answered, ‘Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him.’*” He never even heard what she asked! “Only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard.” Do In fact, what Eli doesn’t realize is that when God grants this request, it’s going to be the end of him and his boys. “*Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.*” No matter how perfunctory Eli’s blessing was, no matter how corrupt she knew he and his sons were, she knew that he had spoken as one presiding at the tabernacle, so she took it and trusted it as the word of the Lord. That’s why her face is no longer sad. That’s why she finally ate. She had the assurance that the Lord had not only heard her, but granted her request. Now look at this. The whole history of 1&2 Samuel—the rise of the

national kingdom of Israel under the rule of David—it all begins with the silent prayer of a grieved, barren woman, blessed by a disqualified priest who doesn't even know what she asked.

Let's pick it back up in v.19. *“They rose early in the morning and worshiped before the Lord; then they went back to their house at Ramah. And Elkanah knew Hannah his wife, and the Lord remembered her. And in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, ‘I have asked him from the Lord.’”* They had an early up to make it back to Ramah, but no one was going anywhere without worshiping first. They go back home. They return to the obscurity of the hills. The routine resumes. Life goes on. Farm the land. Open the shop. Do the dishes. School the kids. But now Hannah has the prayer wish and assurance of a priest that God will give her a son. And so, in the hope and strength of that promise, Hannah keeps trying with Elkanah. She doesn't give up, and she doesn't resort to ungodliness. She doesn't offer Elkanah a handmaid like Sarah did to Abraham. *“Elkanah knew Hannah his wife.”* It was just like all the times they'd tried before; yet in the process of that every-day, ordinary, obscure, not-worth-posting-on-Facebook, nothing-new-life, *“the Lord remembered her.”* Suddenly, this time, in God's sovereign goodness, at just the right time, in response to a believing prayer out of her bitter despair, IT WORKS! Because *“the Lord remembered her.”* And Hannah remembered the Lord. We pick it back up in v.21, and what a difference a year makes.

“The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the Lord the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, ‘As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the Lord and dwell there forever.’ Elkanah her husband said to her, ‘Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him; only, may the Lord establish his word.’ So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him.” Ah, this year she has a son, and she named him Samuel, since it sounds like “heard or asked of God”. She named him that so that both she and he would remember that he is the Lord's answer to her prayers. And she's not interested in payback against Peninnah at Shiloh this year. She's content to stay home with Samuel. And Elkanah has also become a better husband. When Hannah decides to stay home with Samuel, Elkanah could have pressed her. *“Sweetheart you made a vow, and your vows are my vows, so you're coming with me this year. No putting it off. Don't get attached. This year more than any, it's important that you come with me to Shiloh.”* But Elkanah has wised up about how to lead his wife. The last thing we heard him say to her was *“Am I not better to you than ten sons?”* Now he says to her, *“Do what seems best to you; wait until you've weaned him; only may the Lord establish his word.”* Elkanah has become a patient husband, a wise husband, less exacting, but no less godly. He gives her space and time with Samuel. He trusts she'll keep her word and make good on her vow before too long.

And sure enough, once she's weaned him, probably when he's around two years old, which was normal then, *“She took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, and ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh. And the child was young.”* This is a really generous offering, over double what would have been required for a free will or thank offering like this. It shows both Hannah's gratitude and Elkanah's wealth, godliness, kindness to his wife, and that he's not stingy when his wife wants to be generous. *“Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, ‘Oh my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the Lord. For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord.’ And he worshiped the Lord there.”* That last note “he worshipped the Lord there” might be Eli, but it's more likely Samuel, since Samuel is the one referred to as “him” or “he” three times in v.27. It's probably not that Samuel the 2-year-old immediately began leading worship. It's probably that he worshiped there as

the pattern of his childhood. He stayed there, learning the ropes of priestly service as a kid. Hannah wept. She asked. She vowed. God remembered. God gave. So Hannah remembered. She gave.

POINT

Hannah's helpless sorrow illustrates Israel's plight in a real-life mini-drama. During the period of the Judges, Israel was being unfruitful in the land. Hannah needed God to remove her sorrow and shame by making her fruitful. Israel needed God to remove her sorrow and shame by making her spiritually fruitful with righteousness. Hannah and Elkanah had tried and tried to no avail. So had Israel. It would take God's sovereign act of blessing to give Hannah a son. And it would take God's sovereign act of blessing to give Israel a king. The Christian gospel according to Hannah is that **God cares enough about His unworthy people to give them a worthy Leader**. Samuel Himself will become the prophet-priest who anoints the King who prefigured the Christ. Samuel as a prophet prefigures Christ as our prophet. Jesus is the one whose parents unwittingly leave him behind at the temple only to prove that He hears God's word better than they do. Jesus is the one who is God's word, who listened to God's word, who relayed God's word, obeyed God's word, and fulfilled God's word. Samuel as prophet prefigured the Christ who explains the unseen God to us, because Jesus had been with the unseen God from eternity past. Samuel as priest will prefigure the one whose obedience prepared him to become a sacrifice more pleasing than the blood of bulls and rams. point for us as individual Christians is that **God grieves our hearts only to elicit our prayers for his provision, to His praise**. He sends us grief, and He lets it linger, in order to make us cry out to Him and ask Him for what He wants for us. He works his providence through our personal griefs and in response to our prayers. **God's gospel is a story of grief to glory, and so is the Christian life**. God sends us grief to draw our hearts out to Him in prayer. He wants us to bring our sorrows to him. And the reason he does that is so that his sovereign providence and plan can become His personal response to our requests and his tender comfort for our sorrows. And faith trusts God to glorify Himself in our grief.

ELEVEN ENCOURAGEMENTS

1. God is sovereign over all our sorrows. The Lord closed Hannah's womb. The Lord did that. It broke her heart. Then Peninnah poured salt into the very wound God had inflicted.... What is that thing in your life, Christian? What is that thorn in the flesh, that sorrow, that frustration and shame, that dark, confusing cloud hanging over your life, that God Himself has sent, the one he won't take away, the one your enemies exploit against you? What is your attitude toward God about that thing—the disease, the regret, the relationship gone sour, the reputation ruined, the loved-one lost? Is God less glorious to you, less trustworthy to you, less worthy of your prayers, because he brought that sorrow into your life and has yet to take it away? Hannah wept at that table. And then she prayed and cried hard to the very God who had closed her womb, because she knew he was the same God who alone could open it. Yet all too often we criticize God for his hard providences in our lives, we doubt his goodness, we resent his hard and dark decisions over us, and so we give him the cold shoulder. We refuse to pray to him about his difficult providence in our lives. Maybe we even find fault with him for holding out on us.

But oh friends, beloved in Christ, we do not know the end from the beginning like He does. John Flavel said "Let God work out all that he intends, but have patience till he has put the last hand to his work, and then find fault with it...if you can."³ Wait for him to finish, Christian. He is not done yet. Little did Hannah know sitting at the table that year, that the year following she would be feeding her firstborn, much less that her son would become the prophet who would anoint the King who would prefigure the Messiah. And Christian, little do you and I know about God's future purposes for our present sorrows.

³ John Flavel, *The Fountain of Life* Sermon XVII "Of the Kingly Office of Christ, as it is Providentially Executed in the World, for the Redeemed", in *Works*, 1:220.

No, we cannot all be Hannah. We cannot all be as significant in God's plan as she was. There were many barren women in Hannah's day, and we know nothing of such reversals for them. But rest assured, when we come to meet Jesus on the last day, we will know full as we have been fully known, and we will realize that Christ has done all things well for us. "With mercy and with judgment my web of time he wove, and always dewdrops of sorrow were lustered with his love. I'll bless the hand that guided. I'll bless the heart that planned, when throned where glory dwelleth, in Immanuel's land." If you are part of Christ's repentant people, then you can not only say that; you can sing it, even through tears.

2. Jesus is the great proof of God's care for His sad and empty people, because He is our God-given Prophet-Priest-King. **Acts 3:24** "And all the prophets who have spoken, from **Samuel** and those who came after him, proclaimed **these** days." Samuel is a prophet-priest who foreshadows Jesus. Jesus is the miracle born baby who becomes our Greatest Word from God, and the High priest who represents us before God in Heaven. He is the answer to our confusion, the joy that will end all our sorrows. He is the Nazirite better than either Sampson or Samuel, truly sanctified to God's service for God's glory and the salvation of His people. Jesus is the one who will ultimately heal all our sorrows by taking them on Himself. Jesus brings God's word to us, because He is God's word to us. Jesus sacrifices His own blood. Jesus enters the temple in heaven with better sacrifices that cleanse our consciences from sin. Jesus is the one who comforts us. He makes sense of our sorrows, replaces our sadness with joy. He makes up for all our losses. And His pain has become our gain. This is why God says to us through Isaiah, "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned..." because Jesus has come and given us the good news that He Himself has paid for all our sins in His death on the cross in our place.

3. Playing a part in God's providence for others doesn't mean God is pleased with you (1:17; 2:30-34). Eli encouraged Hannah with God's intention to answer her prayer. She took his word to her as gospel. Little did Eli know that it would be Samuel's little ears that would first hear God's word of Eli's demise. Friend, you might have some position or office. You might have the seat of honor and the ease that goes with it. You might even play a part in encouraging the people of God or pushing forward his plan in history and in the world. But that doesn't necessarily mean you're repenting of your sin and trusting in Christ alone yourself. Eli's sons were evil, Eli himself was complicit in their evil, and even though they were "spiritual leaders," God swept them all away in judgment. Make sure that's not you. Don't trust in position or gifting. Don't trust in earthly power or blessings or honor or influence. Repent of your sin and trust in Christ's blood and righteousness alone to atone for your soul. If you want to talk and pray about doing that, I'd be glad to do that you, and so would any other member of this church.

4. Be encouraged that God's faithfulness is not limited by unfaithful leaders (1:3, 13-15). Maybe you've been deeply hurt by ungodly church leaders. Hannah was falsely accused of drunkenness, by someone who should have functioned in her life like a pastor! But that didn't make her trust in God any less. Nor did she disrespect Eli, or doubt God's word when Eli spoke it, even though, as we'll see in chapter 2, everyone knew how bad Eli and his sons were. Don't doubt God or dismiss Jesus just because some people take his name on themselves in vain. God is true, even if every man is a liar.

5. Pray and Cry to God for Spiritual Children (1:10). Hannah took all her grief and bitter tears to God in prayer. She cried out to Him in all her confusion and hurt and disappointment. And that's when God made her fruitful. Friends, this is how we should be praying for spiritual conversions, for regeneration in the hearts of others, for revival in our own cities. God promises in **Isa 56:5** to give to the godly in His house *a monument and a name even better than sons and daughters*. We should be praying that God will

give new life to people as we speak God's word to them in our preaching and our personal evangelism. Maybe you are bitterly disappointed at your lack of fruit in Christian living and ministry. Maybe you're like Hannah. You look at your brother or sister in the pew ahead of you, and how God has blessed their life and ministry with fruitfulness. His cup is running over, yours is still empty, and Sunday after Sunday you struggle with jealousy and sorrow and frustration and self-pity. What did Hannah do? She asked God through tears. Christian, ask God. Ask God through tears. God wants your tears, Christian. He wants your sorrow. He wants your despair and confusion and hurt. He is weaving your web of time with sorrow so you will bring it all to him for healing, strength, fruitfulness, and meaning. Because the truth is, we don't pray until we are weak, and sad, and confused, and lonely, and broken.

Hannah's sorrow is the experience of every Christian and every church who wants to bear good fruit in Christian character and ministry. **Isa 26:18** *"We were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind. We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen."* Yet what does God answer later in Isaiah? **Isa 49:20-21** *The children of your bereavement will yet say in your ears: The place is too narrow for me; make room for me to dwell in' Then you will say in your heart: who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away, but who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; from where have these come?"* **Isa 54:1-3** *Sing O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married, says the lord. Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.*

Christian, God knows and sees the frustrations of His own people. You are trying in vain to bear good fruit, only to be ridiculed by others, attacked by Satan, and even prevented by God's providence. You may be seven or eight years into that sorrow, like Hannah. You may be 12 years in, like Joseph in prison on false charges. Christ has not forsaken you or forgotten you. He can make you fruitful, no matter how long you've been barren. Take it all to Him in prayer. Cry hard to him in your closet. He sees you. He hears you. He feels you. And he has given you a book full of promises to pray back to him. So take Him at his word, and be encouraged by His promises in Christ, just as Hannah took Eli at his word and soon her attitude changed, because she believed God had heard her prayer and would act on it wisely.

6. The Obscurity of God's people is no obstacle to His power for them (1:1). With all that is going on in the world today, it might be tempting for you to think that God has bigger fish to fry than your suburban sorrows. O contraire. It wasn't the priest God heard. It wasn't the husband. God heard a woman. Not a modern white western cosmopolitan woman. God heard an ancient, country, barren, brown woman whose husband took a second wife because she was barren. God heard her. And if he saw her, if he heard her, then he can see and hear you, sad Christian. Small as you are, out of the way as you may be, whether you live out in Tick Bite, North Carolina, or in a sea of indistinguishable humanity in a high rise apartment in Chicago, God sees. God hears. God knows. And he remembers.

7. Remember that God remembers you (1:11, 19). You feel forgotten by God, abandoned even. That is a normal feeling. You are not alone in feeling forgotten by God. God's people have often felt forgotten by Him. But no matter how forgotten you feel, Christian, God will never forget you. He cannot forget you, because your Christ, your great high priest, the one greater than Samuel, sits at the right hand of the Father and presents his wounds there as a lasting memorial to the Father's commitment to save you by the dying love of his Son. And if God has given you his son, he will give you all things. Do not take God's

silence or patience as neglect, or amnesia. God is not oblivious to your hurts. He sees your every grief. He hears your every prayer. He bottles your every tear. Jesus is presenting His blood sacrifice to God for you right now in God's immediate heavenly presence. He bears your name on his hands and heart just as clearly as the priests bore the names of the twelve tribes on their own breastplate in the holy of holies. How could God ever forget anyone for whom His own Son died? Your High Priest is there continually presenting God with the proof of His dying love, to merit God's attention for you (like Ex 3, God hears his people groaning, God saw, and God knew So also Woodhouse, Davis).

8. Entrust your grief to God's mercy. Hard providences are God's invitations and prods to prayer. Entrust your helplessness in your grief to God's power. God can restore all the years the locust has eaten. He can strengthen you. He can make every previous effort fruitful the next time you try. Mark it well, brothers and sisters: Your grief as a Christian is always for God's glory in Christ.

9. Commitments your Kids to Christ (1:23, 28). As soon as Hannah had weaned Samuel, she let him go to God's service. The son she cried for...prayed for...agonized for. Don't worship the children God gives you. Give your children to the worship and service and glory of God. Trust God with your kids, whether they are 3 or 43. Hannah knew the character of Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas. Everybody knew. Eli said to his sons "*I hear of your evil dealings from all these people*" (2:23). They were stealing God's sacrifices, sleeping with women, selfish, sinful and corrupt as they come. Yet that didn't stop Hannah from leaving Samuel there in God's overruling care. She never got cold feet. We have a lot of new moms in this congregation. You can't protect them from everything. It's a big bad world out there, you're right. And God is sovereign over all of its bigness and badness. Teach them. Train them. Proclaim to them the mighty works of God. Discipline them. Evangelize them. And then let them go. Christian mom, if God can sanctify your griefs to you, then God can sanctify your children's griefs to them. That's not an argument for carelessness. It's an argument for trusting God with your children enough to realize that he can protect them even when you're not hovering over them.

10. Keep living the life God has given you while you wait (1:19-20). After Hannah prays, she eats, sleeps, gets up early, and goes back to life with her family in Ramathaim-Zophim (Ramah). Back to the hills, back to country life. Open the shop. Work the farm. School the kids. Clean the kitchen. Do the laundry. No lightning bolt. No angel of the Lord appears to her. God didn't tell her to pursue a whole different kind of life. God answered her prayer in the ordinary course of her obscure life in the rural hills somewhere around Judea. God did the extraordinary, in the middle of nowhere. He can do that for you. He can do that for us as a church. We don't have to be in DC, or LA, or NYC, or Portland, or Paris, or downtown Chicago, to see God do extraordinary things among us in giving new life to people who are dead in their sins. He can bear miraculous fruit among us right here in Elgin just as easily as he did in Ramah. He can produce converts and new spiritual life in your own living room at home. He can teach you in your quiet time as you read and pray at your kitchen table, in your apartment, or meditating in your car during your mundane commute, grabbing coffee with a friend, or talking with your spouse. So pray for it. Believe it. And when it happens...

11. Praise God for Prayers answered (1:26-27). The temptation is to forget God as soon as he remembers you. Don't become a practical atheist just because you got what you wanted. No, Hannah's wasn't a virgin birth. Elkanah knew Hannah his wife—that doesn't just mean he was aware of her. And God worked through that normal, marital intimacy to produce a child that had not been produced any other time in their previous intimacy. Just because God uses natural means doesn't mean he's not blessing them supernaturally. Don't you look back on God's answered prayers and then just attribute them to

natural causes apart from God's supernatural blessing of those natural causes. Do what Hannah did. Don't just imitate her faith. Imitate her praise. She goes back to Eli and testifies to him about God's faithfulness to her. I'm the woman who was praying a few years ago...and I want you to meet my son. "*For this child I prayed, and the Lord has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord.*"

And so we sing:

O Father you are sovereign, the Lord of human pain;
transmuting earthly sorrows to gold of heavenly gain.
All evil overruling as none but conqueror could,
Your love pursues its purpose, our soul's eternal good.

