

MATRIARCHS

A 13 Week Study of Mothers of the Bible

*Discover the Power of Motherhood
through the Lives of Those Who Have
Gone Before Us*

Week: Week 7

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Biblical Mom: Hannah (means "Grace of God")

Title of Lesson: What to Do When God is Silent

Key Influence: Mother of Samuel

Key Verse: 1 Samuel 1

Video Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pSziRZg_Qg

HANNAH: What to Do When God Is Silent

Silence. Once we become moms, peaceful moments suddenly become more rare than clean socks and an empty laundry basket. Even a few precious minutes of quiet in the midst of our daily activities and responsibilities can be a gift to our very sanity -- and by extension to our children. Crazy, stressed out moms usually don't exhibit the fruit of the Spirit!

But every mom knows that silence can sometimes mean trouble. I remember one time I was working around the house while my daughter Molly -- 18 months old at the time -- was playing happily in the family room. All of a sudden it occurred to me that I hadn't heard her for a couple of minutes. Uh-oh. *Not good.* I walked into the kitchen and found her in front of an open refrigerator, sitting on the

floor covered in butter and scooping handfuls from the container into her mouth. Yep, every mom knows a whole lot can happen when our children are silent.

It's often much more difficult to remember that things are happening when *God* is silent. We pray, shed bitter tears and pour our hearts out and hear ... *nothing*. Maybe for years. We begin to believe that nothing is happening. We can't see any purpose in our pain. We wonder if God simply doesn't hear us. Or worse, hears us and doesn't care.

I can imagine that was how Hannah must have felt at times. In 1 Samuel 1, we learn that each year Hannah would travel to the Tabernacle with her husband, Elkanah, to worship and sacrifice to God. Elkanah had another wife, Peninnah, who also went to the Tabernacle with her children. Hannah desperately wanted children, but could not get pregnant.

In biblical times, if a woman could not have children, she was considered worthless and cursed by God. The combination of infertility and societal rejection was an ache and a wound that Hannah always carried with her. **Her heartbreak was compounded by Peninnah's cruelty and a husband who loved her deeply, but couldn't fully understand the depth of her pain:**

So Peninnah would taunt Hannah and make fun of her because the Lord had kept her from having children. Year after year it was the same—Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the Tabernacle. Each time, Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat.

“Why are you crying, Hannah?” Elkanah would ask. “Why aren't you eating? Why be downhearted just because you have no children? You have me—isn't that better than having ten sons?”

Most of us can relate to the ache of an unfulfilled heart desire. Like Hannah, we can become consumed by our pain. We fight bitterness, anger, despair and discouragement as we suffer in the silence of a God who seems detached from our misery.

While Hannah experienced discouragement and deep, piercing heartbreak, she didn't allow it to make her bitter. **Here are a few life-changing lessons we learn about peace, prayer and perseverance from Hannah when our pleas seem to be met with silence:**

She honored God.

Hannah was discouraged and in deep despair. She could barely tolerate Peninnah's cruel taunts. This yearly ritual distressed Hannah so much that she was unable to even eat. Elkanah loved Hannah deeply and saw how much making this journey cost her. He might have allowed her to stay home if she had asked him. If not, she could have outright refused to go.

Instead, Hannah chooses to make this heartwrenching trip, year after year. I'm sure that in many ways she dreaded it. Yet, she went out of love, obedience and reverence to God. She chose -- as an act of the will -- to worship and honor God in the midst of her pain.

We all have prayers that have gone unanswered and wounds that God has not healed. We know that a God that would send His only Son to die a horrific death loves us more than we can imagine. Still, years of pain can challenge our belief in a loving God that is working for our good.

What are some ways that you can choose to honor God through obedience even though you don't understand His ways?

She took her pain to God.

We don't know all the words of Hannah's prayer, but 1 Samuel 1:10 tells us, **Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord.**

I imagine that Hannah's prayer resembled many of King David's prayers. Over and over again in the book of Psalms, David poured out his heart to God. He laid his soul bare. He was brutally honest with God, sometimes questioning His ways and boldly asking if God saw him in his pain. He wondered when God was ever going to act to relieve his suffering. **Look at what David prays in Psalm 22:**

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.

Even Jesus cried out like this to His Father. In fact, the beginning of David's prayer is nearly word for word what Jesus prayed as He was dying in agony on the cross. If Jesus prayed in this way and recorded the raw, honest rantings of David in the Bible, I believe He welcomes our passionate, honest, heartfelt prayers. In fact, He invites them: **“Throw all your anxiety upon him, because he cares for you.”** 1 Peter 5:7

What anxieties are you struggling with right now? What are some of your questions and doubts about God's silence in your circumstances?

She found peace when she released her burden.

The Bible doesn't tell us if Hannah took this issue to God before in prayer, but there was definitely something different about *this* prayer. She was praying with such urgency and so desperately that Eli the priest thought she was drunk.

As she was praying to the Lord, Eli watched her. Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking. "Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!"

She assures Eli that she is not drunk:

I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the Lord. Don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow."

Her sincerity quickly persuaded him of her pure intent and he told her, "...go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him. Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad."

For the first time since we met Hannah, she is at peace. Is it because Eli told her that God would grant her request? No, I don't believe he gives her that assurance. Notice that he says, "*May the God of Israel grant the request...*," not "the God of Israel *will* grant the request..."

Why the change then? **I believe that Hannah finally, truly left her burden with the Lord.** The Matthew Henry Commentary of the Whole Bible says it this way: "She had by prayer committed her case to God and left it with him, and now she was no more perplexed about it. She had prayed for herself, and Eli had prayed for her; and she believed that God would either give her the mercy she had prayed for or make up the want of it to her some other way."

Leaving our burden with God is not an overnight process. It took Hannah quite some time to get to that point. Allowing Holy Spirit access to our hearts is key. Just as He did with Hannah, He will gently bring us to a place of peace and rest that transcends our circumstances.

Where are you in this process? In what ways might you be hindering the Holy Spirit's work in your heart?

She recognized Samuel was His before he was hers.

In her prayer at the Tabernacle, Hannah made a vow to God: “O Lord of Heaven’s Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the Lord, his hair will never be cut.” 1 Samuel 1:11

Was Hannah making a bargain with God? I don't think so. I believe Hannah was exhibiting humility and acknowledging God's authority. She was telling God that if he blessed her with a son, she would dedicate her son's life to Him and raise him up in such a way that he would be prepared for devoted service to God.

This is no easy prayer. Recognizing that our children truly belong to God often means letting go of our own desires for them and exchanging them for His. It very often means letting go of control, at times staying silent ourselves (so hard!) and trusting Him to work in their hearts and minds.

I am experiencing this right now. My 19-year-old daughter, Molly, recently left home. She is now a financially independent adult. I can influence her, but I can't send her to her room. I can speak truth into her life, but I can't control her choices. I can show love to her, but when she makes decisions that grieve my heart, I have no power to change them. I can only pray and trust in the power of her heavenly Father. He will remind her of the truth of His Word. His Holy Spirit is at work in her in ways that I cannot always see.

Like Hannah, I have to remember that Molly is *His*. He created her and blessed me with her under my roof for 18 years. Like Hannah, I have to trust my child into His loving care and know He is always working for her good. It is the most secure place our children can be.

I asked the Lord to give me this boy, and he has granted my request. Now I am giving him to the Lord, and he will belong to the Lord his whole life.

What area(s) are you having difficulty surrendering to God? How might you be hindering God's work in your life or your child's life by refusing to let go of control? What can you do to change that?

Pain Gives Birth to Things

Can you imagine how Hannah must have felt when she heard Samuel's first cry -- this baby that she had waited for and wanted so desperately for years? When my daughter was born, the umbilical cord twisted tightly around her neck as she was delivered. The first time I saw her, her face was purple and she was silent. I also had a traumatic birth and unplanned C-section with my son. He also emerged without a peep. The silence was terrifying. I breathed an incredible sigh of relief when they each finally took her first breath and began to scream. It was such a sweet sound!

But here's the reality. We may never get our Samuel. We may not always receive certain things that we want so desperately. I understand. For 20 years, I have struggled with chronic pain. Like Hannah, I have prayed tear-soaked, desperate prayers for healing. It hasn't come.

God worked through Hannah's pain to give birth to things -- peace, trust in Him, humility, gratefulness. He transformed her heart and mind -- whether He ultimately answered her prayer for a child or not. I am seeing Him do the same in my life.

I don't understand why God doesn't always answer our prayers. Here's what I do know: He is always working in our situation. He cares about every external detail of our lives, but He doesn't stop there. He desires our *internal* transformation much more. He wants for us to find peace and contentment that is dependent on our hope and strength in Him, not on our circumstances. They are just too shaky and unpredictable. God never changes. We are always on solid ground when we place our joy, hope and security in Him.

By following Hannah's example, we set a powerful one for our children. A mom that honors God, brings her burdens to Him, recognizes His authority and trusts Him with the outcome will have a powerful, lasting impact on her children, as well as those around her.

Today, I challenge you to bring your pain and your burdens to Him. Boldly ask Him for the desires of your heart. Be honest with your doubts, questions, frustrations and fear. But also ask Him to open your heart to how the Holy Spirit wants to work in your mind and heart through your pain.

Seek Him instead of an answer. In time, you will find both. The answer may not always be the one you'd hoped for, but through the process, He will change *you*. I promise.

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:13

WHAT GOD'S WORD IS SAYING TO ME: _____

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HOW I CAN APPLY IT TO MY LIFE: _____

PRAY ABOUT IT: Dear Father, I come before You humbly. I cling to the Truth that You are a loving good who is always working for my good, even when I can't see it. Please help me to open my heart to Your Holy Spirit. Change my heart so that it wants what You want. Use the wounds that I carry to draw me closer to You, so I can experience a deeper understanding of Your character and Your love. Enable me to place my children, my desires and my trust into Your capable and mighty hands. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE:

My heart rejoices in the Lord! The Lord has made me strong. Now I have an answer for my enemies; I rejoice because you rescued me. No one is holy like the Lord! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. 1 Samuel 2:1-2

