

Good morning First Baptist Church. Welcome back to our service and also some of you who may have been logging in from other parts of the world, welcome back to our service this morning. Today, we are celebrating a special day, actually today is Mother's Day. Now for all the mothers out there, Happy Mother's Day. Why we celebrate Mother's Day? Well, I think if you look at Matthew chapter 23 verse 37, God actually describes himself, the kind of love he has for his people as a hen, actually mother hen, who actually gathers the people of Israel under his protective wings. You see, when we reflect back, I think the thing that hits us most, impacts us most about how mothers, is their love, gentle, patient, faithful love that never lets you go and God has designed that relationship so that we will understand what it means when God loves us as well. So, to the mothers out there, mothers and grandmothers, praise the Lord for you, blessing on you on this special day.

Alright, just don't forget that today we're also going to be celebrating the Lord's Supper, a very special program by, David and Suzanne Adams going to be preaching together and they're going to lead us in the Lord's Supper. So get your wine, get your bread, get it all set.

Now let's go back to the normal announcements. We are gonna have our regular Zoom prayer meeting at 9:00 p.m. that's been happening all throughout this pandemic. Please remember to log on, some of you who are regular and some of you are not regular when you feel a bit down please come for the prayer meeting. Number two, we're gonna have to Talk2U program where you actually log on to the website. You can see the telephone number, if you're feeling lonely, down, out, you need somebody to talk to please ring us. We've got a team of people, very happy, willing to basically minister to you and be ministered and be comforted ourselves. We have the Covid-19 fund. Our team is regularly going out to minister to quite a number of families who are struggling during this time. So, please remember to basically sow into the Covid-19 fund.

Now regular programs. Gamma is as usual, every Wednesday at 8 p.m. come and join us for the Gamma meeting, but before that we will have the teaching on the website, that is on the Gamma web site, just click on the Gamma photo. This week it will be about integrity, about whether we need to swear or take oaths in order to prove our integrity. So Jesus deals with that specifically, so come it is going to be a very interesting meeting as well. Now lastly there will be the Alpha. Alpha is resuming again on the 3rd of June. This is an opportunity for us to basically talk to friends, relatives, colleagues. You see MCO may have locked us down but through internet the gospel is not impeded. The gospel needs to go on because people need Christ more so during this time of crisis than ever before. So get these friends of yours all interested in Alpha, lock them in, it is June 3rd 8:00 p.m. Keep that in mind. Even if you don't have any friends please pray, so that they might be able to come and join us and we'll have a big crowd at this Alpha and it's the first time Alpha will be done online. So we're excited. I hope you are excited to. Come and join us at that time.

Good morning church and welcome back to our online worship. By now we would have been social distancing for about 40 days already. Now I personally miss being with all of you and I really can't wait to worship all of you again. But even so I believe that this is a time where we are learning to trust in God, and to trust in his faithfulness and he is still faithful to all of us and that his love endures forever. So let us all come together now to worship Him in his great love for us and his faithfulness. He is welcoming us and he invites us to enjoy his presence. Let's all draw near to him now as he has drawn near to us.

Scripture reading this morning is taken from Psalms 46 verses 1 to 7. I invite all of you to read these words with me right now in light of all that we are going through as a prayer.

God is our fortress and our help. Now let this song together calling on God and confess our need for him.

Father this morning we declare that you are Lord over all and though your ways are not our ways, to you alone we raise our songs of grateful praise because all your ways are good. Father this morning we come pleading before you with hearts burdened by worry and fear. We ask God that you be our comfort in dark times and our joy in good times, so that your name alone will be praised for evermore. Speak to us this morning and may your greatness be made known in our lives in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Now we come to a special time in our worship where we worship the Lord with our tithes and offering. If you look below, DuitNow transfer money to BT76 is the usual way in which we receive tithes and offerings for the kingdom and as we meditate on our offering let me just share with you from today's reading in 1-Timothy chapter 6 verse 17.

Brothers and sisters, this is the time, this is a crisis where people are in need. People are in need physically as well as spiritually. All of us especially those who are born again, who are Christians, this is the time where your help is needed. This is time where your funds are needed and Paul tells us you who are rich and I tell you most of us in this church would be described as rich because compared to migrant workers, compared to refugees who have nothing, we are brought up for this time that we may contribute and play a role in God's kingdom. So let's prayerfully look at what we are to give this morning. Let's pray.

Father Lord we thank you that you have provided so much for us compared to so many people in this country, the millions of migrant workers, millions of foreigners, we are rich and we ask O Lord, this is the opportunity that we might do good, that we may build up a sure foundation for ourselves as we exemplify the kind of love that comes from the Holy Spirit. We pray O Lord you guide us as we give willingly and cheerfully to you. We ask for Jesus sake. Amen.

Finally we come to a time of corporate prayer. Just to remind you that on the 31st of May we have a special prayer meeting, prayer Zoom meeting. It is not going to be like the regular 9 O'clock but this is the kind of prayer meeting we want the whole church to come together to pray. And so please join us on the 31st of May as we come together and pray together as a church. This is the a once a month prayer meeting in which we would want everybody to take a special effort to come to pray. So let's bow our heads as we go to God in worship and prayer this morning. Father Lord we come before you this morning. We want to worship you as our God. We come before you first of all to confess our sins. As we look to Psalm 51,

Father Lord, we thank you for every spiritual blessing in heaven, which you have given us. We thank you for adoption as your sons, that we are now co-heirs with Christ in the future with a hope no matter what crisis will hit us. Thank you O Lord for so many of us. You have kept us safe. You have sustained us. You have brought us to your side time and time again. We give you thanks.

Father we come and ask that you grant us in our hearts the spirit to move so that we have the generosity to share our riches with the poor and help us set our hopes not on our worldly riches, our worldly property, our worldly station of status, help us set our hopes on you. Grant us freedom from anxiety and ability to bring everything to you in prayer, realising that you are a god who was also tempted in every way possible through your son Jesus Christ. Father Lord grant us a spirit of rejoicing in the many blessings that you've had in our lives and let these blessings sustain and inspire us as we go to difficult times.

Father Lord these are the lists of your people who are ill, suffering, in distress. Father we are going to pray for every single one of these names on the list that thou will sustain them, thou will give them comfort, thou will be their strength, thou will be their joy in the midst of trials, and thou would heal them. We ask this in your precious Son's name. Amen.

1 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.

3 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. 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. 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?"

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. 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."

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."

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.

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."

Verse 24

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.

The Word of God.

We too want to welcome all of you on this Mother's Day. And a special greeting is extended to all mothers who are listening. Thank you for all you do and have done in the very important god-given responsibility of raising children. May God's grace and blessings be a living reality in each of your lives.

Today we want to look at the story of a woman named Hannah who became the mother of Samuel. Even though her son became one of the great men in God's salvation story, Hannah dealt with much disappointment and pain in her journey. Her story can help each of us to deal with pain and hopelessness whether we are a mother or not. Her story can help us to realize that God wants to do a work of grace in our lives, in my life, in your life.

The story of Hannah from 1-Samuel chapter 1 is set at the period of the judges, the end of that period. The book of Judges ends with this statement, which describes the life in those days. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. And the results were catastrophic. Ignoring God and his guidelines for life brought the people to deeper and deeper lows, moral, ethical, social and political low points, as well as religious apostasy with many people turning away from the true God to worship idols.

And this is the environment in which Hannah lived. She was one of two wives of a man named Elkanah. Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah had given birth to many children, to sons and two daughters but Hannah was barren. She had no children. Each year Elkanah, Hannah and Peninnah with all her children would travel to Shiloh, to the tabernacle, to worship the Lord Almighty and to offer sacrifices.

Considering the environment in which he lived, Elkanah appears to be a good man, a God-fearing man. He continued to worship the true God, offering sacrifices at the tabernacle. We also see that he was conscientious about fulfilling his vows to God. Yet for at least some in Elkanah's family it appears that the religious activities might have been just empty rituals because there was no resultant change of heart.

Hannah was in a terrible predicament. She couldn't conceive, she couldn't produce a child. Since barrenness was considered a source of disgrace for a woman in the ancient world. Hannah lived under a cloud of shame. You see back then a woman's value came from her ability to bear children, especially male children, who could work and carry on the family name and children could provide for future financial security. If a woman in ancient times had male children she was considered a success. If not, then others in that culture might have looked down on her. Can you imagine how Hannah must have felt? No doubt she experienced gnawing pain and questions of her self-worth.

Every time the family made the long journey to the tabernacle to offer sacrifices there, Elkanah gave some of the meat from the sacrifices to Peninnah and some to each of her sons and daughters but he gave a special portion to Hannah because he loved her very much, despite the fact that she had borne him no children. Peninnah like to make Hannah feel miserable about not having children, especially when the family was at the tabernacle offering sacrifices. Peninnah would provoke Hannah, resulting in Hannah crying and refusing to eat. This went on year after year.

Peninnah was apparently proud of the fact that she had borne many sons and daughters to Elkanah. She had met the expectations her society placed on women. She was a success, a person of worth. She had made a positive contribution to the family and to their clan. So she looked down to Hannah, probably seeing her as a failure, one who did not measure up in that society and no doubt she was

also quite jealous of Hannah since Elkanah appears to have shown more love to Hannah than to her. So try to imagine the ridicule Hannah would receive from Peninnah. Peninnah might have said something like, "Hannah doesn't have children, I do. Elkanah is pleased with me and God is pleased with me. Just look at all the children I have." Hannah suffered. She couldn't conceive and she suffered abuse. Most likely she was torn up by anger and despondency. Her situation seemed hopeless.

Elkanah really loved Hannah but that does not mean he understood her. The fact that Hannah was childless was probably no major problem to Elkanah because he had many children, but for Hannah this was an unbearable tragedy. Elkanah tried to express his love for Hannah but his attempts to show love by giving her special treatment at the sacrifices undoubtedly just made matters worse, increasing the jealousy and the taunts from Peninnah. One year at the annual sacrifice after having been provoked by Peninnah Hannah began crying and refused to eat. So Elkanah asked, "Hannah why are you crying? Why won't you eat? Why do you feel so bad? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons? Now I'm not an expert in these matters, but it was probably not a good idea for Elkanah to bombard Hannah with a long series of why questions, especially when the answer was so obvious. And this final question, Don't I mean more to you than ten sons? It might have been a little better had he told Hannah, you mean more to me than ten sons.

So Hannah had a choice, would she build her life on her husband's love, even without children or would she hope for her social standings sake that she could eventually have children someday. No, she chose neither. She decided to do something else. She arose from the annual meal and she took decisive action. She went to the temple, the Tabernacle to pray. Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. And she made this vow, O Lord of Hosts 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's been dedicated to the Lord his hair will never be cut.

Now what does that mean? What's the significance of never cutting a boy's hair? Well, it was definitely not a fashion statement. The people of that day who served the Lord would recognize that this was the sign of a Nazarite vow, like we find in the Book of Numbers chapter 6. A Nazarite was one who was set aside for the service of the Lord. He was to be holy. Now sometimes Nazarite vows were taken for just a shorter period of time but Hannah is saying, if God will give me a son I will give him back to God for his entire life.

All her life Hannah had wanted a child for herself. Now she wanted a child for God. The scripture says as Hannah was praying to the Lord, Eli the priest sitting by the entrance to the tabernacle watched her. Hannah was speaking in her heart, only our lips moved but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she had been drinking. He said, must you come here drunk, throw away your wine.

Poor Hannah, not only she had been taunted by Peninnah, now she is being ridiculed by the religious leader, Eli. Not only did her husband not understand her, now the priest is being insensitive. This undoubtedly only made her pain worse.

Hannah said to the priest, "Oh no sir, I've not been drinking wine or anything stronger but I am very discouraged and I was pouring out my heart to the Lord. Don't think I'm a wicked woman for I've been praying out of great anguish and sorrow.

At that point, Eli understood what was happening but up until then he had failed Hannah as a religious leader but now he said to her go in peace. May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him.

Hannah said to the priest, oh thank you sir, may your servant find favor in your eyes and she went back and she began to eat and she was no longer sad. The scripture say that after she prayed she was not sad any longer. It doesn't say that she prayed, she became pregnant and then she had peace. No, peace came after spending time in God's presence.

The following morning the entire family rose early. They worshiped the Lord and then they made the long journey back to their home. Elkanah had relations with his wife and the Lord remembered Hannah and blessed her with a son. She called him Samuel because she said I have asked the Lord for him.

When Samuel was weaned, Hannah and Elkanah took him to the Tabernacle in Shiloh. They brought with them an animal for the sacrifice. After sacrificing the animal, they brought the boy to Eli. Hannah asked him, "Sir, do you remember me. I'm the very woman who stood here several years ago praying to the Lord. 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," And they worshiped the Lord there. And Hannah prayed a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God.

In the story of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, we learn how God worked in her life and how she experienced God's grace. Through the experiences of that mother many years ago we can see that God wants to do a work of grace in our lives today and this is true not only for mothers and all women it's true for everyone. God wants each of us to experience his grace. From Hannah story we will see four ways God extends His grace to us today. First of all, God is gracious to us in that he understands our pain. Hannah suffered a lot of emotional pain. She did not meet up to her society's expectations. She was taunted and ridiculed by a rival wife. Her husband seemed incapable of seeing Hannah's position from anything other than his own perspective and she was even misunderstood by the priest. She struggled with much inner turmoil but God understood her pain.

I'd like to relate an experience I had as a mother that caused me intense emotional pain. I remember how strongly David and I felt a call from God to leave our country and begin life and ministry in Germany. We were very excited to start a new adventure, thinking that our children would join us in our enthusiasm for exploring a new culture and a new way of life, meeting new people, going to new places but that was not the case. Several weeks after we first arrived in the country, we enrolled our kids in the local German schools. So they began kindergarten in first grade, knowing only a few German words. They were not even attempt to speak German in their classes and they refuse to practice it at home with us. We thought surely they'll begin to speak after a few weeks. But weeks dragged into months and they still refuse to speak German. Over a year passed and they began the next school year, still not speaking a single word. One of the German teachers told us very bluntly, I would have sent this child to a psychologist. We knew that this must have been emotionally very difficult for our kids and there was really nothing else that we could do. I felt a deep sadness, even despondency and I began to question if we really had understood God's calling on our lives. I began to doubt God's goodness, but I too like Hannah brought my pain to God. I began giving my concerns about our children's emotional and social well-being to the Lord, committing this burden to him and honestly admitting that I didn't have the answer, but that he did. It was a great comfort to know that he understood my pain and my inner turmoil.

In time, they did gradually begin to speak German and ended up doing quite well, as a matter of fact our oldest daughter is now teaching German, the very language she originally had refused to speak but for almost two years I struggled with the agony of knowing our children were having such a difficult time. It was extremely helpful to me to know that God knew what I and our children were going through.

Yes God understands our pain. While a wide variety of things can and do bring pain into our lives, one common concern of our time today is the coronavirus. As the pandemic spreads all over the world more and more people are getting sick. The death toll continues to rise and the economic and financial fallout is severe. Knowing that God understands our pain can bring comfort and strength. Hebrews chapter 4 tells us that Jesus is our great high priest. He understands us because he lived on earth as a human being. Verse 15 from that chapter tells us Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. One thing that means is that he understands our pain. Verse 16 goes on to say that we can come with confidence to the throne of grace, to the throne of God and there we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. That brings us to another way God extends His grace to us today. Not only does he understand our pain, he hears our prayers. God wants us to bring our concerns to him.

It's okay to acknowledge our struggles, expressing them doesn't mean that we don't have faith. It is okay to cry out to God about some emptiness we need God to fill. You can pray your feelings. You know religious people sometimes deny their deepest darkest feelings, thinking that good people don't say negative things and they certainly don't get mad at God. Some people think that we need to vent our emotions but they find that even when they vent the problems don't go away but the Bible tells us to pray our feelings, to saturate our deepest need with His love and with His presence.

Ecclesiastes 3 verse 1 says, there is a time for everything, a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to mourn, a time to dance. Hear the words of 1-Peter 5 verse 7, give all your worries to him because he cares about. And listen to this prayer of King David in Psalm 34 verse 4. I prayed to the Lord and he answered me. He freed me from all my fears. Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy. No shadow of shame will darken their faces. In my desperation I prayed and the Lord listened.

Hannah poured out her heart to God. She came to him with empty hands and a broken heart but the broken heart of an obscure woman mattered to the Lord and our heartfelt prayers matter to him.

Philippians 4:6 tells us, do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with Thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. God tells us we can bring our concerns to him. He hears us. Now that does not mean that God will always answer our prayers the way we want him to. God does not give everybody a son who prays for a son but God does hear us when we pray. He understands our pain and he invites us to bring our concerns to him. From the story of Hannah, we can see another way God's grace can work in our lives. God gives us our ultimate sense of value, of self-worth, of well-being. Hannah probably had low self-esteem and feelings of inferiority. She was looked down upon by others. Based on the cultural expectations of her day Hannah was a failure. She had not born any children. So, she had little value in the eyes of others. Now many of us today might say how cruel how terrible, what a terrible way to look at women and it is cruel it is terrible to value a woman solely on her ability to reproduce. But before we are too hard on that culture back then we need to realize there are some cultures today with that very same view. The expectation for women is get married and have children, preferably male children and if she does that then she is considered to be a person of worth. Other cultures may not place that particular expectation on woman, but they use other means to measure worth, such as beauty. If a woman is beautiful then she has value. For many people today the worth they see in others is based on how that person looks. Is the person attractive, what color is their skin, to what ethnic or racial group do they belong? We tend to place a higher value on people like ourselves or people who we like their looks, but we sometimes dehumanize those different from us, looking down on them as worthless. Other measuring tools our society might use in determining somebody's worth would include education, career, money, success and a variety of status symbols that we use to show off wealth and power.

If you have all of this then you really are somebody. If not, you have little value. Yes, our society today can be just as cruel to women and also to men as Hannah's society was. Looking down on others, seeing them as having little or no value, worthless. This can be devastating to a person, causing a multitude of problems. Hannah realized that God accepted her and more than that he loved her. She came to understand that she was not worthless. She had value and worth in the eyes of God. He did not look at her the way society did. After spending time with God in prayer, Hannah's view of herself changed. She was able to rejoin her family and eat and her face was no longer sad. Hannah's sense of worth could be based on God's love for her.

I remember struggling with feelings of low self-esteem in my high school and college years. In America back then the preferred personality for a girl was that she was bubbly and effervescent. She was popular, made lots of friends but that wasn't me. I had a few good friends but instead of loving to party and having a good time I would rather have read a good book or played the piano. I was introverted and I liked my alone time but that meant that I wasn't accepted in the popular circles. I felt less valued. I was afraid my peers didn't like me that they really didn't see me and I remember asking God why he didn't create me with a different personality. As a young woman I was encouraged by other believers to study and meditate on the scripture regularly, which I began to do and God led me one day to discover Psalm 139, a psalm of David. As I read it and pondered the prayer I felt God speaking directly to me. The psalmist words became my prayer. I still pray this prayer. Listen to some verses from this Psalm that have touched me and changed me, O Lord you have examined my heart and you know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You know everything I do. I can never escape from your spirit. I can never get away from your presence. You made all the delicate inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. How precious are your thoughts about me Oh God. They cannot be numbered.

After meditating on these words, I gained a new perspective about how God sees me. I realized that he knows me through and through that I'm very important to him and feelings of self-worth began to increase with the realization that he created me uniquely and had a purpose for my life.

When you look at others what criteria do you use to determine your opinion of their value. Do you use typical standards of this world or do you see persons as people of worth, created by God in His image, people whom God loves, individuals for whom Christ died. And how do you determine your own sense of value and worth? Is it based on society's standards and expectations or is it based on God's love for you, His desire to have a personal relationship with you. God extends his grace today. He wants to give us an ultimate sense of value of self-worth of well-being.

A fourth way God wants to do a work of grace in our life is he wants to transform us, changing us on the inside. He wants to renew our minds and change our hearts.

One of the ways God creates change in us is that when we come to him and honestly share our struggles with him. He will give us peace. I've experienced this peace as a woman, as a mother and also during the physical and emotional pain I endure during cancer treatment. This peace is a deep sense that God is in charge of my life and that he is working out the very best for me. David has already quoted from Philippians 4 verse 6, don't be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. The following verse, verse 7 is also very important, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Hannah cried out to God in her distress and God gave her peace, even before she became pregnant even before God granted the requests she made. The peace Hannah felt is not the kind of peace the world gifts. Jesus said, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. God's grace can change us inwardly, giving us peace even in the most difficult of situations.

God also wants to transform our values, our priorities and our desires. In the Bible story we see that Hannah had desired a son for years. One probable reason she wanted to have children was that's what women were supposed to do. Then she would be a success and would be regarded as a person of value in her community. She wanted a child in order to silence Peninnah's taunts and ridicule. And she wanted a child to prove herself to her husband. It appears that at the beginning Hannah wanted a son for herself, but we see a change of heart as the story progresses. By the end of the story Hannah wants a son not for herself but for God. Do you see the difference?

Hannah realized that whatever God might give her really belong to him, so her prayer was no longer, God I want something for myself but God I want a son to give to you and to your service. We often come to God with our wishlist, telling him what we want him to do, but God's role is not that of a mythical genie who will grant all of our wishes. Rather he wants to change our desires, so that we desire what He desires. So that our will is conformed to his will. Now that might cause some people to hesitate to come to God because they do not want to be changed, but remember God loves us. He understands us. He knows what we need. So we can come to God in faith, allowing him to change our desires and our priorities. So we too will realize that everything we receive from God really belongs to him. God wants to change our heart, our desires, our values. Related to this God also wants to change our perspective on life and our understanding of his work in the world.

We see God doing this in the life of Hannah. At the beginning Hannah had not realized that God was at work in her circumstances, but by the end of the story Hannah had come to a new perspective on life and a much better understanding of God's working in the world. Sometimes when we look at life we are filled with anxieties, worries, fear and we're all painfully aware of that during the current Covid-19 pandemic. We do not always understand why certain things happen or do not happen. Just like Hannah could not understand why she was barren. We may not be able to see God at work in certain situations just like Hannah was not aware that God was working through her pain to bring her to himself, but we can rest assured that God is sovereign. He is working in the world. He is working in the hearts and lives of people. Even in and through our pain, God can work.

Years ago I remember talking to my mother-in-law about having children. At the time she got married the general expectation for a woman in the United States was for her to marry and raise children. My mother-in-law had also had the personal desire to have many children. She said that she had grown up as an only child and had experienced loneliness because she had not had any brothers or sisters. So it had been her desire to get married and have many children. Things look good for her, she got married and within her first year marriage she conceived and she was so happy. But then she suffered a miscarriage. To make matters worse her obstetrician then told her that she would never be able to have a child. One of her deepest desires had been to have children, many children but after the miscarriage she was confronted with the medical opinion that she could never carry a baby to term. And she was devastated. She experienced intense disappointment and agonizing pain knowing she would never be able to have any children.

Well obviously the doctor was wrong. I'm the second of four children that my mother gave birth to. More than 30 years passed after mom had that disheartening visit to the doctor, she and dad then began leading a Bible study for young adults most of whom were married. Over the years of working with this group, several young women came to my mother grieving over a miscarriage that they had

just gone through. Mom was able to empathize with them. She was able to encourage them to pour out their heart to God, knowing first-hand how God can give comfort and direction. Mom told me that she had earlier wondered why had she had to go through this emotional pain connected with her initial inability to have children. Why had God allowed that? Later as an older woman she could look back and see how God had worked in and through this pain. God was able to bring about good out of her suffering. Using it to prepare her to help many other women. We're reminded in Romans chapter 8 that in all things God works together with those who love him to bring about good. This verse first does not say that God causes everything that happens. We live in a fallen world where things happen as a result of the effects of sin. And it does not say that everything that happens is good but it does say that God is working in all situations to bring about good for those who love him, to those who have been called according to his purpose. We can trust God, knowing that he is at work in the world even when we do not understand it.

This perspective in life can bring us reassurance, comfort and strength. Hannah experienced the grace of God and so can we. God wants to do a work of grace in the life of each one of us today. God is gracious to us in that he understands our pain. God hears our prayers. He wants us to bring our concerns to him. God gives us our ultimate sense of value of self-worth, of well-being. God wants to transform us changing us on the inside. He wants to renew our minds and change our hearts. God offers us peace and he will transform our desires into his desires. He will broaden our perspective on life to be able to understand that God is at work to bring about good. Hannah experienced God's grace several hundred years before Jesus came to the world, how much more are we able to experience God's grace today knowing what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. The Scriptures tell us that our sin separates us from God but God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their sins against them. Sin brings death not only physical but also spiritual and eternal death. But Christ died for our sins according to the scripture, taking upon himself the penalty of our sin and he rose three days later in victory over the grave, over sin, over evil. God wants each of us to experience his grace, accepting his offer a forgiveness of sin and of an offer of a right relationship with him. This can be yours when you come to him in repentance and faith, confessing your sin to him, asking his forgiveness and asking him to lead you, allowing him to take control of your life. May the personal experience of God's grace be a reality in the lives of each one of us today. Let us now go to God in prayer.

Dear God, some days feel too hard. We're hurting, not just us mother's but all of us. We're struggling, fighting fear and worry at every turn especially now in the grip of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thank you, the midst of it all Lord that you haven't left us to fend for ourselves. Forgive us for doubting you were there. Forgive us for thinking you forgotten. Forgive us for believing that we somehow know the better way. You are fully trustworthy. You are all powerful. You are able. You are lord over every situation, no matter how difficult it may seem. You are healer and will never waste the grief we carry today. You will use all things for good in some way, nothing is too difficult for you. We pray for those who grieve today and we ask for your comfort, to surround those who weep. We pray for the peace of your presence to cover our minds and our thoughts. As you remind us that the enemy can never steal us out of your hands, he never has the final say over our lives. We are safe in your presence forever whether in life or in death when we put our trust in you. We thank you that your ways are higher than our ways and your thoughts are bigger than our thoughts. We lay it all down at your feet, every burden, every care. We thank you for Jesus who paid the penalty for our sins on the cross, that when we come to him in faith we can come into a right relationship with you because of what Jesus has done. Lord we know that when we've received your forgiveness we can then with confidence come into your presence, bringing all of our cares to you. We love you Lord. We need your grace. In the powerful name of Jesus I pray. Amen

As we observe the Lord's Supper, I realize that this will be different for us. While we're under restricted movement orders and while we are avoiding large gatherings for health's sake. As a church body we desire to come to the Lord's table together in community, but under the present circumstances we cannot do that. So instead we come together virtually, knowing that we are bound together by the Spirit of God. Remember the Lord's Supper is a time for believers, for followers of Jesus to partake of the meal, is for those who have come to the Lord in repentance and faith, those who have surrendered their lives to his lordship. The Lord's Supper is a vivid reminder of God's grace. We rejoice in God's love, remembering that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. We celebrate the work of God's grace that he has done in our lives as we confess that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and that we are justified freely by His grace through the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus. The Scriptures tell us we should examine ourselves, examine ourselves under the illumination of the Holy Spirit and then we can eat of the bread and drink from the cup. Let's pray. Almighty God we come before you and confess that we are unworthy but we know that you are worthy. We thank you that through your mercy we can come into a right relationship with you. We pray that as we examine our lives, the light of your Holy Spirit will shine on our hearts. With the psalmist we pray search me O God and know my heart try me and know my thoughts, show us what we need to bring before you in confession and repentance. Thank you that when we confess our sin you are faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Amen.

On the night before he was crucified, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as a way to remind his followers of the sacrifice he would make that would provide atonement for sin. The scripture tells us that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and he said this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Let's pray and give God thanks for the bread and also for the cup.

Almighty God we thank you that Jesus willingly offered his life as a sacrifice that he paid the penalty for our sins, that through your work we can come to you and be reconciled, that we can have forgiveness, that we can receive new life. We know this was a great price that Jesus paid and so we give you thanks for the sacrifice of his body, for his blood. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Let's take the bread together. In the same way, Jesus also took the cup after supper saying this cup is the New Covenant in my blood, do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. Let's drink the cup together. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Let's pray. Father God we thank you again for what Jesus has done. Thank you for the love that you've expressed to us, making it possible for us to come back into a right relationship with you. We thank you for the promise that you are with us at all times. We also thank you for the promise that Jesus will be coming again and we know that you have a future prepared for us.

Almighty God as we go from this service, we pray that your grace will be a reality in the lives of each one of us. The same way Hannah experienced your grace we pray that we too will experience that grace and especially just day by day as we're going through life may your grace be a reality in the lives of each one of us, as we share that grace with other people. In the name of Christ I pray. Amen. And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Go in grace, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, sharing the love of God with others in both word and deed. Amen.