**Week One – August 23/24 – I Samuel 1**

**Warm up question** **and Introduction** - **Of course you don’t remember your own birth, but does your family have any interesting or quirky stories about the day you or any of your siblings were born?** There are many great stories that begin with the birth story of the main character. I Samuel chapter 1 gives us the birth of Samuel, but it can be strongly argued that though he is an important character, he is far from being the main character. (If you doubt this please note that he is not present at all in II Samuel and that he gives his “farewell speech” about ⅓ of the way through I Samuel!) The main character could be seen as Saul, or maybe David, but in these early parts of the book all the “characters” point to the relationship between two other “characters”, the Israelites and a God who is faithful despite their fickleness and unfaithfulness.

**I Samuel 1:1-20**

**Read verses 1-8**. Our short intro to Hannah is, “Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.” FOMO is not only a 21st century phenomenon – it is as old as time. Childlessness when children are desired is a difficult path. **What are some big versions of feeling forgotten or on the outside in the world today? What about among students today or in your own personal experience?**

One of the toughest phrases to deal with is in verse 5, “the Lord closed her womb.” For so many people the question of “How can a good God allow bad things to happen?” is a big faith hurdle. Throughout I Samuel, just like in our lives today, we will watch God allow difficult things to happen to individuals and to His people. And also just like in our lives today, the pain may last a while and there may be a long wait until perspective is given about how God’s redemptive work will be seen. Let’s get perspective from a couple other passages.

First, **read Romans 8:28** - **Is this verse always immediately encouraging, or is it sometimes hard to hear at first? If it is hard to hear at times, why is that?** This verse is not always easy to hear in the middle of a tough storm, but its truth becomes clearer as God matures us and we see the whole story around us unfold. **Where have you witnessed God use a really tough situation for good farther down the road?** Second, **read John 16:33** - **How do Jesus' words to his closest “inner circle” give us perspective when we have troubles? The disciples (and us) can take heart in the fact that everyone faces troubles, but what is the significance of the greater “take heart” that Jesus gives them? What are some practical ways that you have taken/can take heart in times of trouble?**

It is easy to dismiss Peninnah as a completely bad person (okay, she is pretty bad) but let’s not pass up the opportunity to ask some questions and learn from her. We can start learning by extending some compassion. Elkanah made the polygamy mess in their family, not her. And Hannah was not likely the only one with FOMO - Elkanah showed favoritism to Hannah, so it would make some sense that Peninnah’s cruelty to Hannah was rooted in her own FOMO as she lacked Elkanah’s full attention and affection. However, the difference between these two women is in how they responded to their hardships. We see Peninniah respond with cruelty (v.6) and we’ll learn more of Hannah’s response in the next section. **What can we learn from how these two handled their feelings of missing out?**

**In your “life story” to this point, have you found yourself more likely to run to God or run away from God when facing something really difficult or painful? (And maybe even share a bit of why you feel you have responded that way.)**

**Read verses 9-20** - We begin to see here the beautiful heart attitude of Hannah, even in her suffering. **In verse 11, what is the significance of Hannah calling herself God’s servant twice? How does this way of thinking shape your understanding of making requests to God?** Hannah displays the type of heart we should have when praying to God, approaching Him with confidence, but being humble before God. She understands that she is just a servant, but is not afraid to ask what she wants from her Lord.

Sometimes we can emphasize language more than the state of our heart when we pray. **Which is a bigger temptation for you in prayer - trying to get words “just right” to impress others or trying to get words “just right” so you can get what you want from God?** Hannah poured out her soul before God, who hears and understands the language of our heart. **Why is it tempting to lean towards superficial “christian phrases” when praying to God? What barriers make it hard for you to pray completely honestly and vulnerably to God?**

Verse 18 and 19 – This experience changed her, even though she had not yet experienced her hoped for result - she was “no longer downcast.” Hannah worshiping the LORD was not contingent upon an answered prayer. God is worthy of praise regardless of if we receive the specific blessing we ask of Him. **What are we communicating to God when we make our worship of and love for Him contingent on whether or not our prayers are answered the way we want? What is a prayer that has not yet been answered? In what places can you tell God is growing you through the days of waiting?**

Verse 20 - Note the significance of Samuel’s name, especially in light of trusting God through difficult times. It is as if Hannah builds an altar to worship the Lord to remind herself and others of His faithfulness. Every time her son’s name was spoken, it was a reminder of the faithfulness of God. **How are you reminded of God’s faithfulness, even when and especially when things are hard and you don’t understand the difficult things happening around you?**

**Read I Samuel 1:21-28**

Consider the last phrase, “And he worshiped the Lord there.” It is clear that Hannah’s faithfulness to rest in God’s faithfulness taught this man of God a thing or two about faith! **When has the faith of others bolstered you towards trusting and worshiping God more? When has God used your life in this way to encourage someone?**

**Conclusion and Application**

How can you be praying for each other - ask if anyone would like prayer in areas that relate to the themes we have covered:

* Prayers for specifically feeling forgotten or for some other difficult situation.
* Prayers for growth in faith - that I can trust an unseen God to faithfully lead me.
* Prayers for forgiveness for any “Peninnahs” in my life who have wronged me.
* Prayers that my growth in faithfulness might encourage others, as Hannah did for Eli.
* Others?

**Additional Notes**

This chapter, like a few other Old Testament accounts, can be mistakenly applied as approval of a man taking multiple wives. That interpretation is easily refuted by the consistency of Scripture. First, Genesis 2:24 shows this to be out of God’s plan for marriage and that same passage is highlighted by Jesus in Matthew 19:5. Also any account of polygamy in the Bible never goes well and is never viewed as a positive God-ordained option. The mess that Elkanah creates is definitely no exception.