

## Pa232 Counseling

### *Lesson Pa232-21 Family Issues: Desire for a Child*

Sometimes a person feels that something is wrong and they become distressed. They try to understand what they have done wrong. Have they offended God? They wonder how they can change the way things are.

At the time of this story women believed something was wrong with them if they could not bear children. They thought it was their fault. The society counted a woman's value by her dowry, her beauty, and her family heritage. Most important, however, was for her to bear a healthy male child. People assumed that the reason for a woman's inability to bear a child was that God was punishing her for misdeeds. This was a source of great shame to barren women.

Hannah was one of two wives of a man named Elkanah. The first wife made fun of Hannah because she had no children. Elkanah loved Hannah but believed God had prevented her from having children. He sorrowed for her over this and showed her even more attention. Listen to this woman's story as if she has come to you. Take notice of what she says and what is being said to her. Hear her prayer. Hear what her husband says to her and how he treats her. Listen to what she says to the priest and to his response.

A certain man named Elkanah had two wives. One had children, but Hannah did not. Year after year they went to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the Lord. On the day they offered sacrifice to the Lord, Elkanah would give a portion to his first wife and her children. But he would give two shares to Hannah because he loved her and because he felt the Lord had kept her from having children. His first wife would tease Hannah every year. She would provoke her until Hannah cried and would not eat. Her husband would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? ... Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

Hannah was very sad. She wept and prayed, "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 back to the Lord."

Eli the priest noticed her as she was praying silently and thought she was drunk. She was praying in her heart. She said to the priest, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled.... I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

He replied, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." She left and her face was not sad anymore (1Sam 1:1-18).

When counseling, you need to remember:

- You may not agree with why the person believes they have distressing problems. You may not have agreed with Hannah about why she had been unable to bear a child.
- You are listening to a person express their thoughts and are not judging them as right or wrong. When you evaluate a person or judge them, it may keep them from thinking about or examining the problems causing the sorrow.

- You do not need to defend God or his actions. It is God's business why Hannah was childless and why God later permitted her to bear children. You cannot speak for God.

In Genesis we hear how "Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again, for the Lord had kept all the women in Abimelek's household from conceiving because of Abraham's wife Sarah" (Gen 20:17). Abimelek had thought Sarah and Abraham were brother and sister and may have taken her as his wife. God has his purposes and his timing. Sarah was to be the mother of Isaac; Hannah the mother of the prophet Samuel.

Effective counselors hear people say things that are not true and did not happen the way the person thinks. However, you must begin with the things *they* believe to be true. You listen and work with what they say. Remember this is *their* 'story.' Hannah was in great distress over her childlessness and needed to express her sorrow. She believed her barrenness was a punishment from God. She needed to ask God for help.

Your best way to handle sorrow that may include incorrect thinking is to let that person explain. What do they believe is true and why? *Your goal is to show compassion, to be aware, to listen, and then to offer counsel.* Start by learning what the person believes about their problems. Listen and give time and attention to understand. Help them identify the facts and ask God for help and answers. In Hannah's story, this is what happened:

- Her husband's first wife teased and shamed Hannah because she was childless.
- Hannah's husband, Elkanah loved Hannah just as she was.
- She prayed and made a vow that if God gave her a son, she would dedicate that child to him.
- The priest, Eli, told Hannah that God had heard her prayers.
- God opened her womb and Hannah bore a son to Elkanah.
- When he was old enough, she took him to Eli the priest to be trained into the priesthood.
- God gave Hannah three more sons and two daughters.

God decides how he answers our prayers. As a counselor, you are free from the need of speaking for God or apologizing for God. You cannot predict what God will do to answer prayers. Counselors are responsible to listen without judgment and to show compassion. Ask God to help you understand the person. Then ask God to help you to support them in their distress and offer guidance.

This lesson is **important** because people often come to counselors with questions that are hard to answer. No one can speak for God or defend him. You can show his love to a troubled person and help them seek him for answers to their prayers. Barrenness is still a problem for some couples today.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God has a purpose for each person, and he does hear our prayers. His answer and his timing may not be what we would like, but he expects believers to trust him. Counselors can help to strengthen a person's faith and trust in the Lord.

Answer these questions for **review**:

1. People in great sorrow and distress can behave in ways that are misunderstood by others. What did Eli the priest think was wrong with Hannah? [Pause]

1. If you said that he thought she was drunk, you are right.

2. Are problems always caused by sin and result in God's punishment? [Pause]

A. If you answered, "No, problems are not always caused by sin and we cannot speak for God," you answered correctly.

3. Did Hannah make a vow or promise to God if he would give her a son?

A. If you said, "Yes, she vowed to take her firstborn son to the priest when he was old enough, and she did," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story of Hannah so that you can share it with a group of believers. Teach them that all problems are not caused by sin. Explain that God hears and answers prayer. He wants us to show compassion to those who are distressed and to encourage them to trust him. Pray together for God to show you people who are in need, whom you can reach out to.