

# 1 Samuel Ch1v1-18 - Where Is God?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Thank you.

It's 271. So 1 Samuel chapter 1, and we'll read the first 18 verses of this chapter, of this book.

There was a certain man from Ramathayim, a Zulfite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Alkanah, son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zulf and Ephraimite.

He had two wives. One was called Hannah and the other Penina. Penina had children, but Hannah had none. 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.

Whenever the day came for Alkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Penina and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah, he gave a double portion because he loved her and the Lord had closed her womb.

[ 1 : 5 7 ]     Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. 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.

Her husband Alkanah 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?

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. In her deep anguish, Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly.

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. As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart and her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard.

[ 3 : 0 6 ]     Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, how long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine. 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. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman. I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.

Eli answered, go in peace and may the God of Israel grant you whatever you have asked of him. 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. Let's ask God for his help as we spend time in his word. Heavenly Father, we want to thank you and praise you for your word to us this morning.

And we pray that it would be doing its work in our lives, in our minds, in our hearts. Lord, that you'd be impressing its truth on us, making us more like Jesus as we see him more clearly this morning.

[ 4 : 13 ] Amen. Back in 1856, a man by the name of Charles Spurgeon, who some of you may have heard of, he was preaching. And he was preaching in a packed Royal Surrey Gardens music hall.

And somebody in the middle of the crowd shouted out fire. And this was before the days of fire regulations and fire safety and so on. And it caused this deadly panic.

There was a stampede and many people died as a result. Seven people lost their lives in that incident. And it severely traumatized Spurgeon.

He suffered from depression and what we would call post-traumatic stress disorder for the rest of his life. And even though it was 150 odd years ago, more 170 years ago, you hear that even from a distance.

And you think, why would that happen? Here is a man preaching God's word to people. And there is this awful tragedy that occurs, this awful grief for not only the families of those who lost loved ones, but also for Spurgeon himself.

[ 5 : 28 ] It perhaps was one of the reasons why he wrote that the mind can descend far lower than the body, for in it there are bottomless pits. The flesh can bear only a certain number of wounds and no more, but the soul can bleed in 10,000 ways and die over and over again each hour.

When Spurgeon said that he wasn't making light of physical suffering. But what he was saying was that there was this mental or emotional suffering or grief that can sometimes go along with physical suffering or can be separate from it.

That is quite profound. And for Hannah in verse 10, as we encounter her, she is in a place of deep anguish, deep anguish.

And you start to realize that God's people, children of God, can go through times of deep anguish, deep grief. And it may be similar to Hannah's circumstances that cause us that grief.

Or it may be for other reasons. It may be as a result of losing a loved one. It may be as a result of losing work or a home.

[ 6 : 44 ] It may be a broken relationship. And Christmas is a time when it seems to raise these things, whether they are memories from years gone by or whether they are fresh in our minds.

Our griefs and our sufferings don't get paused over Christmas. And as we head into the new year, we want to learn from Hannah, in a sense, what it is we can do with our grief.

How do we cope? Where do we turn? How do we find God in grief and suffering? And what we want to acknowledge first is simply that deep grief can be poured into God's people.

Deep grief can be poured into God's people. In verse 1, it seems that we're being set up to expect a king. There's this family tree given with all these unusual names that are hard to pronounce.

And often when a family tree like this is given in the Bible, you're expecting a king at the end of it. Somebody powerful, somebody influential. And yet at the end of this, where we settle, where we are settled, is with Hannah.

[ 7 : 53 ] At the end of verse 2, Panina had children, but Hannah had none. And what we realize is that Hannah is living in a world where it is not as she would want it to be.

And her life is not what she had expected when she married her husband, Elkanah. And for her it is deeply upsetting, is this place of deep anguish as this deep grief is poured into her soul through this experience.

We had friends some years ago who lost a baby son. The son passed away and they were such godly people.

They were such godly people. And I realized, we realized in that moment that this deep grief can be poured into godly people like our friends, like Hannah. And in Court Baptist Church, as I look around on a Sunday morning, we're not a big church, but there are very few people who you could say that they have not experienced suffering or grief of one form or another.

For Hannah, what adds to her grief is the fact that there is this other woman, Panina, who is also married to Elkanah. They are in this polygamous relationship and we're told about it because it happened, but not because it was good.

[ 9 : 21 ] It was not according to God's design. And Panina, what she did was she rubbed salt in the wound for Hannah. In verse 6, her rival, that is Panina, kept provoking Hannah in order to irritate her.

And so Panina is intentionally hurting Hannah. She's intentionally adding to Hannah's grief by her words. And you can imagine what it would be like for Hannah to see this or to hear this from Panina.

For Panina, who has children, the temptation would be that Hannah, looking on at this, would be thinking, here is a lady who is not pursuing God. She's not a kind person.

She's not a godly person. And life is going better for her than it is for me. And this would add deeply to Hannah's grief as Panina tries to provoke her in this way.

Not only does Panina add to Hannah's grief, Elkanah adds to her grief as well. In verse 4, whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife, Panina, and to all her sons and daughters.

[ 10 : 36 ] But to Hannah, he gave a double portion because he loved her. So Elkanah is doing his best to be kind to his wife, Hannah.

But Hannah is not in a place where she has any interest in food and eating. She is experiencing grief at a level where she has lost interest in eating and food and just going through the normal things of life.

And so for Elkanah to be giving her this double portion as though this could make it up to her, the grief that she is experiencing is unintentionally adding to her grief.

For those friends of ours who lost their son, their baby, people would say things that they intended in a kind way, in a well-meaning way.

When they had another child some years later, they would say things like, well, that kind of makes up for your loss, doesn't it? And they meant well, but it actually added to the suffering and the loss of this dear brother and sister.

[ 11 : 48 ] Because, of course, nothing could make up for their loss. And for Hannah, the grief she's suffering is not going to be solved by Elkanah giving her more food.

And so year after year, this is going on for Hannah in verse 8. Her husband is asking her, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons? Year after year, Peninnah is provoking her.

And what adds to her grief is that Hannah has a big view of God. Hannah has a big view of God. Hannah doesn't see God as somebody who just wound up the universe like a clock and just let it go.

And take its course. The Lord is mentioned time and time again in these verses. In verse 3, the Lord is mentioned. In verse 5, the Lord is mentioned. In verse 6, the Lord is mentioned.

In verse 7, the Lord is mentioned. In verse 9, the Lord is mentioned. In verse 10, the Lord is mentioned. In verse 11, the Lord is mentioned. In verse 12, the Lord is mentioned.

[ 12 : 52 ] but the question for Hannah is where is the Lord in her suffering, in her grief? She has a big view of God. She knew that God knits people together in their mother's wombs but she also knows that if she didn't have children this was not somehow an exception to God's providence. It is spelled out for us in verse 6. The Lord had closed Hannah's womb and for Hannah this big view of God is going to add further to her suffering. How can she make sense of what God is doing here?

When that friend and his wife were going through the grief at the loss of their son I heard a song that captured for me something of what they must be feeling. The song goes like this there are moments that the words don't reach. They're suffering too terrible to name. The moments when you're in so deep it just feels easier to swim down and perhaps for you you can relate to Hannah's suffering and grief. It may be because of a similar relationship or dynamic to what Hannah is experiencing or it may be for other reasons. The temptation for us in that moment is to think well I'm pursuing God but where is God in this? The temptation for us in that moment is to think that God doesn't love me or he must be punishing me for something. Why is my life turning out the way it is?

The temptation for us in that moment is to distance ourselves from God. To start skipping time with God's people. To start neglecting our prayer life. And there is nothing that Satan would love more than to allow our suffering to separate us from the sense of God's presence in our lives. But what we're shown clearly here is that there is this deep grief that can be poured into the lives of God's people. But God sees that. He draws our attention to Hannah. Not to the powerful, not to the mighty, but to this lady who is grieving. Deep grief can be poured into godly people.

What we see secondly is that we can pour our grief out to God. We can pour our grief out to God. In verse 9, once they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. I don't know if you had Christmas dinner with family or friends. I don't know how many extensions you had to put on the table to house the turkey or the ham. There's that moment when somebody stands up in the middle of Christmas dinner and you're thinking, why are they getting up? And maybe they're going to get a drink or whatever it might be.

Hannah standing up in the middle of this was a significant move on the part of Hannah. Everybody else is maybe finishing up eating and drinking, putting stuff away, washing up the dishes. Hannah gets up.

[ 16 : 10 ] Hannah knows that even though eating and drinking and having time with family or friends is a good thing, there comes a moment when she just has to get to God. That getting to God in her grief is more important than eating and socializing. That although those things can be helpful, at times she needs to get to God. To paraphrase an old author, don't you know that from every town and every village and every hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London or in our context, a road to Cork and rightly so. The author goes on, from every grief, there is a road towards Christ. My dear brothers and sisters, when we experience grief, when we experience grief, we need to say, where is the road to Christ? I will go over hedge and ditch, but I would get at my master for I will know no good in my grief, in my suffering, unless there is a savor of Christ in it. Hannah realizes she needs to get to God in her suffering. And what draws her to God is that she knows she can be honest with him. In verse 10, she is feeling this deep anguish as she prays to the Lord. She feels that, and sometimes we shouldn't trust our feelings, but sometimes our feelings are absolutely bang on. Of course she's feeling deep anguish. And she prays that distress to the Lord as she weeps bitterly. She prays that anguish to the Lord in verse 11 as she reflects on her misery. What draws her to God is she knows she can be honest with him in her grief. What draws her to God is she knows that she is to be humble before him.

In verse 11, she refers to herself as your servant. Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me and not forget your servant. She knows she can't heal her own heart.

She knows she is out of her depth, that she is at her limit. Grief and suffering is a humbling thing for us because we want to be able to change it, but we can't. But if it draws us to God with this realization that he is God and I am not, then that grief can work good in our lives.

Like the psalmist who says, better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. Hannah knows that she needs to get to God in her grief and in her suffering. And as she does that, she doesn't really care what other people think. In verse 13, Hannah was praying in her heart and her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. She doesn't care so much about what other people think. She cares about getting to God. Sometimes it can be the case that our concern about will this be, how this will be seen, is what restrains us from going to God. But Hannah realizes she needs to get to God in her grief.

She needs to get to God in her suffering. For Hannah, God is everything in this moment. Verse 14, sorry, as she prays, she is just conscious that he is the one who can bring about change in her heart and in her life. And so she pours out her grief to God. And you wonder why, for Hannah, she's going through this. And we don't have all the answers. But what we do know is that he has brought her to a place where she experiences God in a way that Elkanah and Penina never experience God, as far as we know. That it's in the midst of her grief that she has this honesty and this humility before God and this profound intimacy with the Lord that Elkanah and Penina and many others never have. That she has this depth of relationship where he meets with her in her prayer as a result of her grief. That doesn't answer all our questions about why this is happening in Hannah's life. But if our grief, if our suffering brings us to God, if it draws us to God, then it can be a good outcome for us. And so we want to learn from

[ 21 : 04 ] Hannah to get to God in our grief. And we want to realize this isn't a given. So sometimes we will think and we will say, well, it's at your wit's end that you will pray. It's as a last resort that you will pray. It's when you're at rock bottom that you will pray. But that's not a given. Actually, sometimes it can be the hardest time to pray when you're feeling at rock bottom. I remember having COVID back when COVID was at its peak. And I had never been sick the way I was sick with COVID. Three days of just being absolutely flattened. Some kind of mild hallucinations, heart palpitations.

I was just floored. That was the moment I needed to get to God in prayer. But it wasn't easy to do that. Hannah teaches us here we need to get to God in our grief. And what will draw us is to realize, as Hannah did, that we can be honest with him, that we can be humble before him, and that actually it's more important to get to him than what other people think about us in that moment. We don't need to blow our nose. We don't need to put on a brave face. We can come into the presence of God with our grief and experience this profound intimacy with him. And if that is one outcome of the suffering that we experience, it is a good thing. And so a question for us as we head into 2026, are you getting to God in your grief? Or are you staying at the table eating and drinking or finding whatever it is that will numb the grief or the sorrow? We want to think lastly about how God will pour peace into our hearts?

Hannah has poured out her grief to God. God will pour peace into our hearts. So if you know the story of Hannah, don't short circuit it by thinking immediately of the answer to her prayer in the form of Samuel. So God does give her an amazing answer to prayer. But that isn't the case for everybody. But look at what happens before Samuel is born. First of all, what happens is that life isn't perfect for Hannah. Everything is not sorted for Hannah. She's still misunderstood in verse 14. She's accused of being drunk by the priest in the house of God. So she's just had this profound experience of prayer with the Lord. And then two minutes later, the priest is accusing her of being drunk, possibly in front of others. As she has poured out her grief to the Lord. It doesn't make everything perfect and neat in her life.

Amazingly, she gives this gracious response to the priest, to Eli. Not so, my Lord, in verse 15. I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I've not been drinking wine or beer. I was pouring out my soul to the Lord.

Now, Eli doesn't deserve this response. You could have forgiven Hannah for shaking her fist at Eli and saying, I've enough of you and your lot. But she graciously responds to his accusations.

[ 24 : 48 ] She actually reflects God, in a sense, to him. And maybe that gracious response on the part of Hannah is rooted in this experience that she has of the Lord. This experience of prayer that has been so precious to her that she will not allow herself to be accused of this in this way. And so she invites Eli to be what Eli should be to her.

And thankfully, he responds in verse 17. He says, go in peace. And may the God of Israel grant what you have asked of him. And so Hannah goes her way. In verse 18, she went her way. She ate something in her face, was no longer downcast. And you can kind of rush through this verse and not think much of it. But for Hannah to now eat something where she had not been able to eat, for her face to be no longer downcast, where she had been in deep anguish, you realise that before there is ever a concrete answer to her prayer, that God has actually poured a substantial amount of peace into her heart as she has poured out her grief to him.

That she has experienced God in a way that Eli and Elkanah and Peninnah don't seem to have. And actually, as we reflect on how Hannah has poured out her grief before the Lord, it reminds us of Gethsemane. It reminds us of Jesus. When he is in the garden, praying before he goes to the cross, where he is honest with the Father, where he is humble before the Father, where he pours out his grief before the Father. Hannah's relationship with God in her grief actually reminds us of our Saviour.

We sing sometimes in court, Baptist churches, I'm sure you do hear that hymn with the line, he had no tears for his own griefs. And I have to take a deep breath before I sing it, because of course Jesus had tears for his own griefs. He was profoundly in anguish about being on the cross and experiencing the wrath of God being poured out on him. But what the hymn is trying to capture is the fact that he went through this for us, that he went through this for Hannah, that he went through this for all who trust in him, that he was bearing our sorrows, that he sweat drops of blood for our suffering, that he entered into the suffering and the heartache of this world, that he is with us in it, that he weeps over the tomb of his friend Lazarus, that he is one who can give us profound peace, substantial peace, even as we continue to navigate this world where there is real grief and real sorrow.

I was chatting to that friend recently, the man who, he and his wife, they lost their baby son, and asked him, how are you doing in this grief? It had been a number of years, but I knew this leaves a deep wound in somebody. And he responded by saying, we're doing okay. And to hear him say that was a remarkable thing, because they had been through dark, dark days. And he had been honest in what they were suffering. He had been honest in years gone by in what they were grieving. But to hear him say, we're doing okay. It was this realization that God had poured substantial peace into their hearts. He had poured substantial healing into their hearts. It wasn't that everything was perfect. It wasn't that time healed all wounds. It wasn't that they would ever forget their little child. But what he was saying was, we're doing okay, God is with us, as we have grieved in his presence, he has poured some substantial peace into our hearts. And reminded me, that song that I mentioned earlier, there are moments that the words don't reach, suffering too terrible to name. There's another line in that song that goes like this, there is a grace too powerful to name. And as followers of Jesus, our suffering Savior, this one who has entered into our grief, entered into our sorrow, we can know substantial peace, even in the midst of our suffering. And we know, we know one day we can be assured that one day all our suffering, all our grief will be done away with when he returns. And it'll be a profound thing. It'll be a profound thing for Hannah, and for us to realize, as we see our Savior face to face, that all that the world threw at us, that all the grief, all the suffering, all the heartache, that none of that could separate us from him. That because he went to the cross for us, that he will not lose us. That even if we lose sight of him, he holds us, he has us in his hand, that he watches over us, that he will get us through. And so Hannah is, in a sense, an invitation to us this morning. It's an affirmation that we do experience grief and suffering, even as God's people, in a profound way at times. It's an invitation to pour out our grief to him, to make sure we're getting to God with our suffering. And it is this assurance that he will, in time, give us substantial peace as we continue to journey with him over the years. And so let's ask God now to help us with that and to respond to him. Father, help us as we look into the year ahead. We make our resolutions, and Lord, they remind us how little control we have over even our own lives. Lord, as we try and fail to fulfill them. But Lord, we're reminded in Hannah's story, Father, there are things that we experience that just leave us profoundly out of our depth in grief and sorrow. Lord, whatever this year holds for us, help us to realize, Father, that we can come to you, that we need to come to you with our grief and our sorrow. And help us, Lord, to know that you pour profound peace into us. Lord, we have experienced that in times gone by. Help us to pursue you much in the year ahead, so that we might experience

[ 32 : 16 ] time and time again. Amen.