



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

God Remembers Real Moms

1 Samuel 1:1–28

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series: Building a Home: One Room at a Time

A young family was driving away from church after a beautiful dedication of their baby. Little Jacob, the oldest brother, cried all the way home in the back seat of the car. His mother asked him what was wrong. Finally the boy replied, "That pastor said he wanted us to be brought up in a Christian home, but I want to stay with you guys!" I love that story because it keeps us humble and it keeps a holiday like Mother's Day real.

Today it is right to honor moms and affirm their calling. It's also right to show moms grace. There are no perfect moms and yet it seems that expectations are placed on our moms by family tradition, or by church tradition, or by society's message, or even from moms placing unreal expectations upon themselves. The result can be at the very least discouraging and at the most damaging. No mom is called to meet unreal expectations. Let's get real.

I saw on a church sign: "If evolution is true, how come mothers still have only two hands?"

Today the mothers in our lives and in our church need to hear from us that their role as a mom to young children is hard, valuable, kingdom-building work. They need to hear from us that we know that their best work is hidden and unglamorous. They need to know that we know the investments and contributions they make to their work is invisible to us but visible and valued by God and valued by the church. That a crying baby isn't a distraction; it's an important reminder that the kingdom belongs to the child-like.

Today mothers need to hear that there are mature women in this church that have walked through motherhood before them. They need to hear that there are women in this church that can mentor them, nurture them, and just listen and love on them, and that they have plenty of tissue to sop up the tears from a good cry. A seasoned mother once said to me, "I remember before I was married that I had three theories about raising children. Now I have three children and no theories."

Today is our second message in our series called, "Building a Home: One Room at a Time." On Mother's Day we determined to focus on the dining room. I think back on the dining room in my home growing up. It was a place where as a young boy I got filled up with great food from my mom, great conversation with my mom. Great memories and not so great memories. I remember being tutored in math by my father, and I remember the smell and taste of liver because my mom had read that liver is healthy. I remember family fights, I remember tears,

silverware slammed down and family members leaving the table in tears. I remember mom kicking dad under the table when he was about to say something to us kids. And I remember planning my mother's memorial service at that table seven years ago. But most of all I remember a loving mother worthy of honor who wasn't perfect, but she was real, and I miss her.

Our Mother's Day text is a story of a real young woman named Hannah who had real problems. Her story may surprise you. In no way was Hannah the perfect mom. I prefer to call her a real mom.

God Remembers Real Mom

Dealing with real problems

He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none (1 Samuel 1:2).

Elkanah had two wives. We see examples of polygamy in the Old Testament, but as I study it I never see it as being a joyful experience for anyone involved. It's important to remember the times. The people of God were being influenced by their surrounding culture; they didn't have good leaders. This was right after the period of the Judges, and the historical setting was described in the last verse of the book of Judges. "*In those days Israel had no king, everyone did as they saw fit*" (Judges 21:25). In the New Testament God shows his grace by very clearly teaching us that being a husband of one wife is what produces real intimacy in marriage.

We learn that Hannah was Elkanah's first wife. I would imagine that Hannah had struggled with infertility for many years before he brought in another wife. Remember in that culture the people believed that having children was the greatest blessing they could ever have, and that not having children was a curse.

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 (verses 2-3).

So we gather that Elkanah was a man of faith and each year he made a 20 mile trip east of his town. Shiloh was the place where the Temple Tent was, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept inside the tent inside the Holy of Holies before the permanent temple was built later in Jerusalem. Shiloh was also special because it was the place Joshua picked out for their central place of their worship because of its location on a hill and it was easier to defend against attack.

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. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. And because the Lord had closed her 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 (verses 4-7).

Now you have to wonder if Hannah ever looked at Peninnah and thought to herself, "If I had been able to have children, that woman wouldn't be here." Then there are those family vacations. Peninnah and her 10 kids pile into the mid-sized sports utility van once a year and take a trip to Shiloh for the sacrificial meal. I could see Aunt Hannah sitting there with juice box stains on her dress and gum in her hair watching as her husband served Peninnah and her family first. Sure she got the double portion but she couldn't help but think, maybe I got a double portion because he felt sorry for me, pitied me.

Then imagine the provoking remarks from the other wife. "Hi Hannah, could you help me with my children? I have so many. I know Mother's Day is tough for you, but think of it as a blessing. You can do anything you want, you can do things I can never do because I have all these kids. Hannah, can you help me change a diaper? Do you know how to change a diaper since you don't have any kids?"

If you have ever shared Hannah's experiences you know this speaks volumes. It's hard enough to rejoice when a friend, a sister, or a neighbor has children, when that blessing is withheld from you. Imagine a rival wife to deal with.

I recognize Mother's Day can be a tough day for many of us for a variety of reasons. Maybe you didn't want to come to church today because you don't have children of your own. Maybe your mother is not alive and Mother's Day reminds you of how much you are missing her. Maybe you're tired of syrupy church services that give prizes to mothers with the most kids. Maybe you have a mother who is sick or feeble or doesn't recognize you anymore, and this might be your last Mother's Day with her. Maybe you are a single dad and you struggle with the heartache of watching your kids struggle with no healthy mom around. Maybe Mother's Day reminds you of the horror you experienced when you lost your child.

Some are here today who would give anything to have one child. Maybe you are estranged from your kids for some reason. Maybe you are a mom who made terrible mistakes and you are racked with guilt over the wounds your sins have left on your children. I want everyone to know—let's get real. No matter the past, the future can be different. Because of God's grace we see that kind of transformation regularly and it can be yours too.

Elkanah loved Hannah and saw her suffering and he tried, yes, he tried. He tried to fix it; a total guy thing.

Elkanah her husband 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?' (v. 8).

To paraphrase, Elkanah is saying, "Hannah, how could you feel that you lack anything with me in your life?" What a guy thing to say! Here's a joke someone told me this week about why Clarence sleeps on the couch. Clarence and Gladys were sitting front and center at the pastor's Sunday School class. It was Mother's Day and the pastor had a question for all the men.

"Guys, how well do you know your wives? On this Mother's Day across the USA, millions of men are sending flowers to the special women in their lives. Now, I don't want any of you ladies to give hints, but husbands, what is your wife's favorite flower?"

The room was quiet for several seconds. Finally Clarence smiled and stood. "Pastor, I looked up in the pantry and I can't say for certain, but I think it's Gold Medal flour."

That's why Clarence sleeps on the couch.

Notice that Hannah doesn't go off on her husband. Notice that Hannah doesn't go off on the other wife. What did this real woman with real problems do? She prayed. Now before you tune me out, because I am telling you that in light of the most disappointing thing in life, I am saying to you, just pray about it.

Praying real prayers

Once they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple. In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord.

And she made a vow, saying, "O Lord Almighty, if you will only look upon 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, no razor will ever be used on his head" (verses 9-11).

In bitterness of soul she made a vow. God, if you allow me a son, I will dedicate him to be set apart as a special priest. Probably a Nazarite priest like John the Baptist, abstaining from alcohol and never cutting his hair, eating locusts and wild honey.

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. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine" (verses 12-14).

Can anyone relate to her? Who hasn't been accused of being drunk at church one time in their life? This poor woman... talk about a misunderstood life. Here she is praying and the priest

accuses her of being drunk. Where is the pastoral compassion? She is so broken hearted she can barely get the words out, and Eli is telling her, "Go home and sober up!" Not one of the people in her life who should have comforted her did.

Let's read Hannah's response to Eli's accusation of drunkenness.

"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" (verses 15–16).

Hannah is a real person who has real problems, and feels real pain, and is praying real prayers, and God blessed her!

Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him" (v. 17).

If anyone had the right to get in her chariot and ride out of Shiloh bitter, it was Hannah. But verse 18 says that her prayer brought forth a blessing and she was no longer downcast and ate some meat. Verse 19 says early the next morning Hannah and her husband Elkanah worshiped before the Lord, and then went back to their home.

As I was trying to apply this to us today, it struck me that the point of Hannah's life is not that if we pray for a child God will give us one. The point is that we will receive from God his provision for us one way or another in his time. Matthew 7:11 says, *"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

God answered Hannah's prayer not just so she could have a baby. God had another good gift in mind. God was calling out a special prophet he would work through to bring kings to Israel. He allowed Hannah's barrenness to bring a greater blessing than she could ever imagine.

God's real provision

So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him" (v. 20).

Why did Hannah have to wait? We wait for answers to prayer, not because God is mean, although sometimes it feels like it. We wait not because God has forgotten, although there are times when we feel like he has. It was because it wasn't time yet. And when the time was right, God moved in response to her prayer. When the time is right, God moves in a way that is consistent with his plan.

How many of us have heard the answer "no" from God? If we have we are in good company—the company of Moses who God said no to entering the promised land. No to David when he begged for God to spare the life of his first Son. No to Elijah when he grew so tired and depressed in his ministry that he asked God

to die. No to Paul who asked God repeatedly to remove the thorn in his flesh. No to the most amazing of all, Jesus, when he asked that, if at all possible the cup of suffering would be removed from him.

Sometimes the answer is no, and mothers who are real know this. They can teach us that sometimes the most loving answer we can get from God is no.

Promises kept

So the next year when Elkanah piled his family back into their mid-sized sport utility chariot and headed to Shiloh to worship, two people were missing: Hannah and Samuel. Elkanah is not heavy handed demanding her to go. He isn't saying, "Did I do something wrong? Don't you love me and want to be with me every minute of every day?" Nope. He said in verse 23, *"Do what seems best for you."*

Hannah told him, Elkanah, right now I must pour myself into motherhood. I won't stay back and won't go anywhere until Samuel is weaned. At 3, 5, 7, we don't know exactly when children were weaned from their mothers in those days. But as she had promised, when he was weaned, she brought him back to the temple in Shiloh.

"I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord." And he worshipped the Lord there (verses 27–28).

Now try to imagine for a moment you were Hannah. She had been unable to have children her whole life, and then she has her first child and then while he was still a little boy, she gives him over to the Lord completely for his service. Verse 28 ends with a glimpse into young Samuel's heart. *"And he worshipped the Lord there."* A glimpse of things to come. At a tender age he was able to worship.

Respond with worship

I want us to end on this note. Hannah has no sadness at all. Can you imagine? She has no sadness because she knows she is in God's will, and God is good! Mom, whether you are in the desert or on the mountaintop this morning, know the peace that comes from knowing God remembers you. Hannah was real, not perfect. And God remembered her.

Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God." (1 Samuel 2:1-2).

Seven years ago last January, I was in a hospice room in Colorado Springs. Three years before my mom was diagnosed with colon cancer. She fought her cancer bravely. We prayed for physical

healing knowing that God could heal her. Doctors told us we would have two years, and we got three.

My mom, like most moms, was not one-dimensional. She was a woman who lived a full life and it would have been full whether she had kids or not. She wasn't perfect; she was real. She turned down scholarships to college to go to work after high school to support her ailing sick father back in the 50's. Later in life she went back to school to get her English degree. She was a artist, a gourmet cook and a self-taught investor. But her passion was writing. And I thank God she taught me to write. I remember back in January in the hospice room, we had all her books on a table beside her bed. She wrote children's books and Christian romance books. She liked me to proof her manuscripts. I told her, "Mom, I can look over your children's book, but it's kind of creepy to proof a romance novel that was written by your own mother!" She was a speaker and an editor for aspiring writers. This was at the Biola Writing conference. But I think most of all she loved her children and grandchildren.

Did she have any regrets? Sure. Would she do some things differently if she got a "do over"? Of course; we all would. I wish my new church family could have known her. And if she were here,

I would have brought her on the stage and she would have said something like this: "God remembers real moms. Your existence is essential to God's plans. Your mission is to dedicate your children to the Lord. Your outcomes are determined by God, and your role is to be a growing Christian."

Then she would have turned to me and said, "Enjoy your life and enjoy your family. I will see you soon. No, I don't want to leave you this early, but I will see you again at that great family reunion in heaven. I have this feeling in heaven that I will still be able to make that mushroom soup you like so much and it will be waiting for you on the dining room table when you arrive. No liver, I promise. And next to the soup will be a new manuscript. I am looking forward to writing about all the wonderful things I am experiencing in heaven. I hope you will read it and give me your feedback. I want it perfect."

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.