

WHEN OUR STORIES HURT

Hannah 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...” (1 Samuel 1:11, NIV)

I WAS TALKING RECENTLY WITH A GOLFER who helps run a tournament for a large ministry in town. You know these tournaments; you’ve played in them. They take a large chunk of your day, and then the organizers often try to add more with a dinner and an auction and a speaker.

The difficulties with trying to do too much after the golf are many—people are tired and sweaty and distracted. And what are they distracted with? Well, honestly, maybe half your audience or more are distracted by their miserable play that day. They’ve just finished a rather unenjoyable tour around the golf course, and now they’re expected to give you their undivided attention while you bombard them with long-winded awards ceremonies and confusing auction rules. It’s not easy being a tournament director!

Pain has a way of taking over our lives. It’s there on bad golf days and it’s there when we must manage the unmanageable.

“If your feet hurt, you hurt all over,” one podiatrist’s radio ad used to say. But pain is not just a physical thing. Relationships fall apart, businesses fail, dreams vaporize, expectations go unmet. In days such as these, we are like Hannah crying out to God, willing to make strong vows in exchange for an end to the pain. We are like Paul, pleading for the removal of the tormenting thorn. We are like the disciples in the storm, sure we will capsize and die.

And yet, we don’t. God steps in. We are saved.

Not long ago I sat down with a man whose sins have brought great consequences, for himself and for others. But as he did with David, God has restored this man. Looking back on the pain he has caused and the pain he has endured, this thoughtful brother told me that he tells this to people of pain: “You can’t go back and make a brand new start. But you can start today and make a brand new ending.”

Hannah saw one chance for a brand new ending: the mercy of God. In her pain, she begged for that mercy, and it made all the difference in her story.

Opening questions What kinds of pain have you suffered in your life? What attempts have you made at alleviating this pain? What have you learned from the pain you have endured?

READING 1 Samuel 1:1-28; 1 Samuel 3:19-4:1a; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

The pain of life’s circumstances

What was the source of Hannah’s pain? How did she commit to dealing with this pain? How did God respond to her pleas?

Samuel’s blessing

In 1 Samuel 3, we read that God raised up Samuel to become the spiritual leader of Israel. In what way did this validate Hannah’s response to her pain? How does this help us maintain a trust that God will “work all things together for good for those who love him and have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28)?

God’s grace

How did God’s response to Paul’s cry differ from his response to Hannah? What did Paul learn in spite of his enduring pain?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2014 Links Players International.