

Reproducing Life

Your Life Mission:

1 Samuel 1:9-18

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On this Mother's Day I thought I'd share some items from a list of "**What Moms**

REALLY want for Mother's Day":

- To be able to eat a whole candy bar by herself, and drink a glass of Coke without any "floaters".
- Five pounds of chocolate that won't add twenty.
- A full-time cleaning person, who looks like Brad Pitt.
- For my teenager to announce, "Hey, Mom! I got a full scholarship and a job all in the same day!"
- A grocery store that doesn't have candy, gum, or cheap toys displayed at the checkout line.
- Four words: Fisher Price Play Prison.

There is no doubt that many moms could use some rest. Motherhood is demanding. Of course, some demands are of their making. One man observed: "No matter how old a mother is, she watches her middle-aged children for signs of improvement." No wonder a mother's work is never done!

Today, we continue to reflect on your life mission. Obviously, motherhood is not part of mine; yet, something that mothers do is part of my mission and yours.

In 1 Samuel we are introduced to two women: Hannah and Peninnah. They lived in a polygamous culture and were married to the same man. Peninnah had children. Hannah had none. Each year when the family traveled to Shiloh to offer a sacrifice and feast, Peninnah would taunt Hannah about her barrenness. She would continue until Hannah broke down. As a result, Hannah would weep rather than celebrate and fast rather than feast. Imagine sitting down

to Thanksgiving dinner each year with family and guests, and each year having someone goad you until you lose all appetite and leave in tears without eating.

Was Hannah's desire for children inordinate? Were her actions extreme? We may attribute it to cultural beliefs. After all, the birth control industry today is quite lucrative, and there are couples who want no children. However, the fertility industry is also big. Husbands and wives are willing to pay tens of thousands of dollars for the chance to have children. They have a hunger. Early in my experience, I found that some childless women would not attend worship on Mother's Day because the celebration salted their wounds.

It wasn't the celebration that hurt Hannah; it was Peninnah's taunts. Fortunately, Hannah did not retaliate. Instead, she poured her soul out to God. One could say that what Peninnah meant for evil God intended for good. God was involved in this painful relationship. God mixed the pain from Peninnah with Hannah's faith so that she prayed. Her breakthrough came at the customary sacrifice and feast in Shiloh. Instead of eating and celebrating, Hannah fasted and cried to God. The Bible says that she cried bitterly as she prayed. Even more, she vowed that the fruit of her womb would be given in service to God. Eli, the priest, observed her.

As she was praying to the LORD, Eli watched her. Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking. "Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!" "Oh no, sir!" she replied, "I'm not drunk! But I am very sad, and I was pouring out my heart to the LORD. Please don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow." "In that case," Eli said, "cheer up! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him." "Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad. (1 Samuel 1:12-18, NLT)

I don't think Eli knew he was speaking for God. I think he was just giving a word of encouragement, a word of blessing. The Bible tells us that words from God were very rare at that time. It seemed that God was stone silent. Moreover, Eli didn't even know what Hannah

requested. Hannah, however, felt that God was talking through Eli. She went away believing she would get pregnant.

I've witnessed God work in that way many times. The most memorable occurred during a Sunday night prayer meeting in a church 30 miles north of downtown Minneapolis. One member brought her best friend from South St. Paul. We prayed for her step-daughter who was involved in drugs and prostitution in Chicago. As the discouraged stepmother left that evening, I told her to cheer up. God could bring her step-daughter to our prayer group the very next Sunday. Did I believe that? Yes. Did I think it would happen? No. Did it happen? Yes. She left Chicago and showed up at the prayer meeting the next Sunday. (People, I'd have to be dumb ***not*** to believe in prayer.)

Well, Hannah got pregnant, had a healthy boy and at the proper age fulfilled her vow by giving her son Samuel to serve the Lord with the priest Eli. Eli was so grateful that each year thereafter he would thank Hannah and her husband, saying:

May the LORD give you other children to take the place of this one she gave to the LORD. (1 Samuel 2:20, NLT)

Hannah would go home and get pregnant. She had three more sons and two daughters. That's five annual visits, five annual blessings, five annual pregnancies and five more children. You wonder if after having those children, Hannah would see the priest, cover his mouth, and say, "No!" What was going on with Eli? Do you think his blessings had that effect on all the women? I doubt it. I think the breakthrough was on Hannah's end. Her prayer and fasting broke the curse of barrenness, and then the priest's blessing was free to work in her.

If you ever lived in a small town, you know that the communities are quite tight and news travels fast. We lived in such a town where the Catholic priest pronounced a blessing on the wombs of local women. When the community experienced a temporary baby boom, there was

quite a stir and a lot of discussion (admittedly, much of it was light-hearted). Was God doing something through that blessing? I'm convinced.

Not only do I believe that, but I believe as men and women we are born to reproduce. We are made in the image of our Creator. He produced. In his image we reproduce. This design is not only obvious in our anatomy; the desire is knit into our souls. Therefore, it is natural for some to grieve as we celebrate Mother's Day. Despite that grief, we need to celebrate this blessing and lift up this call. Instead of lessening our celebration, we need to expand it.

We can expand it by embracing our priesthood as believers in Jesus. We can ask God to break the curse of barrenness. We can ask God to open and bless the wombs of those struggling with infertility. We will do that today.

However, we also need to get hungry like Hannah to reproduce spiritually. Two single men from the Bible did. Jesus and the Apostle Paul both were single, but the spiritual children from their work are endless. Each of them has impacted more lives than any father or mother I know of. They sacrificed and gave up their lives so that many of us would experience life.

Every one of us, single or married, is created, redeemed and called to reproduce. We all are to live and work as spiritual parents. If you are not investing in someone's spiritual development, regardless of what you think your spiritual gifts are, you are not living God's dream for you; you are not fulfilling your life mission. Through Jesus Christ you were born to reproduce. You were born to invest and parent others in faith and life.

Being a first-time parent is scary. You are not sure what to do. You need counsel and reassurance. Someone offered this description of the stages of motherhood:

Your Clothes

-1st baby: You begin wearing maternity clothes as soon as your OB/GYN confirms your pregnancy.

-2nd baby: You wear your regular clothes as long as possible.

-3rd baby: Your maternity clothes ARE your regular clothes.

The Baby's Name

-1st baby: You pore over baby name books and practice pronouncing and writing combinations of all your favorites.

-2nd baby: Someone has to name his or her kid after your great-aunt Mavis, right? It might as well be you.

-3rd baby: You open a name book, close your eyes, and see where your finger points.

Preparing for the Birth

-1st baby: You practice your breathing religiously.

-2nd baby: You don't bother practicing because you remember that last time, breathing didn't do a thing.

-3rd baby: You ask for an epidural in your 8th month.

The Baby's Clothes

-1st baby: You purchase your newborn's clothes, color-coordinate them, and fold them neatly in the baby's little bureau.

-2nd baby: You check to make sure that the clothes are clean and discard only the ones with the darkest stains.

-3rd baby: Boys can wear pink, can't they?

Worries

-1st baby: At the first sign of distress--a whimper, a frown--you pick up the baby.

-2nd baby: You pick the baby up when her wails threaten to wake your firstborn.

-3rd baby: You teach your 3-year-old how to rewind the mechanical swing.

Activities

-1st baby: You take your infant to Baby Gymnastics, Baby Swing, and Baby Story Hour.

-2nd baby: You take your infant to Baby Gymnastics.

-3rd baby: You take your infant to the supermarket and the dry cleaner.

Going Out

-1st baby: The first time you leave your baby with a sitter, you call home 5 times.

-2nd baby: Just before you walk out the door, you remember to leave a number where you can be reached.

-3rd baby: You leave instructions for the sitter to call only if she sees blood.

At Home

-1st baby: You spend a good bit of every day just gazing at the baby.

-2nd baby: You spend a bit of every day watching to be sure your older child isn't squeezing, poking, or hitting the baby.

-3rd baby: You spend a little bit of every day hiding from the children.

Although those are overstatements, parenting and spiritual parenting, like any other skill, becomes more comfortable with practice. Beginning steps are difficult, and it is always best to team with others. Are you teaming with others to reproduce spiritual lives? It's your mission!