Series: God's help for the modern family

**How to Cope with Difficult People**

1 Samuel 1:1-20 September 11, 2016

1. Many stains don’t come out in the wash.

*Learning from Elkanah: a man who with no peace in his home.*

a. Elkanah tries favouritism and food to ‘fix’ Hannah, but she doesn’t eat.

* V.5 A double portion would honour Hannah and publicly show how much Elkanah loved her, but it didn’t deal with her problem.
* V.7 Ironically, the one who was given a double portion wept in so much pain that she couldn’t eat.

b. Elkanah tries to gloss things over, hoping a pep talk will ‘fix’ Hannah, but she doesn’t answer.

* V.8 … *And why is your heart sad?*
	+ He refuses to understand his wife’s pain.
* V.8 … *Am I not more to you than ten sons?*
	+ He wants Hannah to look on the bright side, without addressing what’s really troubling her.

c. Elkanah neither recognizes Hannah’s pain nor owns his part in causing it.

* V.2 The Bible never holds up polygamy as a solution to anything. Every example is full of pain.
* V.5 Humiliating one person in order to comfort another, only exasperated the problem.
* People who ignore the elephant in the room usually get trampled by it.
* Elkanah’s theme song? Bob Marley’s “No woman, no cry.”

Q. Do you tend to believe that time will heal all wounds or that everything will come out in the wash? Or do you try to get to the root of the problems in your life?

Q. Have you ever been tempted to offer a bribe to someone (like Elkanah’s double portion to Hannah) rather than address the real issue?

Q. What are some ways we can avoid discounting people’s pain?

2. Battle tactics always breed bitterness.

*Learning from Peninnah: a woman who fought for happiness*

a. Peninnah is brought in as the unloved, pinch hitting baby-maker.

* V.2 She entered into a marriage, probably knowing that her would-be husband was already happily married but needing someone to provide an heir.

b. Peninnah’s cup is always half empty.

* V.4 She had been blessed by a prosperous home and many children, but her focus was constantly on her rival.

c. Peninnah’s bitterness poisons her blessings and blocks God’s help in her life.

* V.6 *… her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her*
* V.7 *So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her.*
* Peninnah’s children, her greatest blessing, would grow up poisoned by their mother’s constant vengeful tactics.
* Neither Elkanah nor God are moved by Peninnah’s actions.

Q. Peninnah felt like she was on the “B team,” having to settle for second best. How can we deal with those feelings positively?

Q. What are some of the things that tempt you to lash out towards those around you?

Q. What are some ways we can respond differently when we’re tempted to take out our frustration on others?

3. Peace comes through surrender.

*Learning from Hannah: a woman who found joy in God.*

a. Hannah’s childlessness caused her profound pain.

* Children were a family’s labour force. More children equaled economic power. Only 4 in 10 children survived to adulthood in those days, so elderly people without many children to support them would often die of starvation.
* Smaller clans faced the threat of attack from larger clans so women who had lots of children were heroes.
* V. 7 Peninnah would provoke Hannah “as often as she went up to the house of the LORD,” perhaps insinuating that she was cursed and unloved by God.

b. Hannah’s childlessness was part of God’s good plan.

* V.5 … *the LORD had closed her womb*
* V.6 *… the LORD had closed her womb*
* Both when her husband is making her pain worse, and when her rival torments her, the Scripture reminds us that Hannah’s childlessness was part of God’s good plan.

c. Hannah found peace in surrendering to God’s purposes.

* Nowhere is there record of Hannah talking back to Peninnah or arguing with Elkanah. Instead she prays.
* V.10 *She was deeply distressed and prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly.*
* In dedicating her child to God, she is vowing to sacrifice the financial support, protection, companionship and help that a child might otherwise give.
* Tim Keller: She’s saying, “All my life I’ve wanted a child for me, but now I want a child for you.”
* V.18 *Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.*

Q. How is message of Hannah’s story different than just ‘pray and you’ll get whatever you want’?

Q. What are some areas you find difficult surrendering to God?

**Notes:**