

# 1 Samuel 1

## *Respecting People*

**Leader:** Spiritual leadership is a gift and a great challenge. Leading people spiritually is difficult wherever we are leading because people are difficult to lead and because we bring our own issues with us. Before long we will be faced with the challenge to develop sensitivity, empathy, and tact while we are dealing with hurting people. Emotionally healthy leadership is not just a matter of saying and doing the right thing. Effective communication with people involves discerning how, what, when, where, and with whom you communicate. Wisdom and hindsight would oftentimes tell us just to listen, pray, and say nothing.

As we move into the first chapter of 1 Samuel in our OTD 1 study, we will quickly discover some people who not only lacked sensitivity, but also “they just did not get it” when it came to dealing sensitively with hurting people. They provide a classic example of “how not to treat a woman struggling with infertility.”

**Facilitator:** Before we read this Biblical story, let’s take some time together to identify with our own stories.

- What is something you have desperately wanted but you could not have?
- Have you experienced the pain of dealing with infertility or the pain of a loved one wanting children but not being able to bear children?
- Some people who have never dealt with the anguish of infertility have “thrown out this baby” (OTD 1) with the bath water because they just can’t relate. How will you prevent that from happening to you?

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**Reader:** Now we'll take some time to read together the first chapter of this story in 1 Samuel 1.

**Leader:** To help us grow together and to sharpen our vision through our study of the Old Testament, we will each have many opportunities to share the lens through which we see Scripture. We will discover so much more as we each share our perspectives and experiences as we interact with God's Word. You may notice there is oftentimes "a story behind the story." Some of our most passionate convictions come from the painful chapters of our life's story lines. From time to time it will be important to slow down and to hear some of those stories so we can know and understand one another at a level that allows for more heart-sharing and heart-understanding.

As the story in 1 Samuel begins, we are introduced to some of the characters in God's "supportive cast." Initially, it sounds more like a dysfunctional family carrying on in a TV sitcom. Big "Mr. Elk" has two wives. Outspoken "Fertile Myrtle," otherwise known as Peninnah, and "Unhappy Hannah," who cannot have children. Peninnah seems insecure and likes to provoke Hannah to tears over the fact that she has children, but her sister does not.

Now picture this family making their annual trek to Mecca where they "worship" and "sacrifice." Provocative Peninnah is rubbing in the face of Hannah that she can't have kids. "Mr. Elk" steps up three times and asks three "why" questions, trying to understand his weeping wife, but he obviously strikes out. Then he probably stuck his frustrated foot in his mouth saying, "Do not I mean more to you than ten sons?" In other words, "You should be happy because you have me!"

The family "worship" experience had to somehow get better because Hannah was in anguish and went to the Lord in tears and cried out from her heart in prayer. She desperately begs God for a son, and she vows to give him to God if only He will answer her prayer.

So where are the “spiritual people” in this story or in this family? Well, the two “priests,” Hophni and Phinehas, have said or done nothing. Their discerning father and pastor, Eli, accused praying Hannah of being an alcoholic. Hannah appropriately asserted herself, spoke the truth in love, and set the pastor straight. He finally “got it” and offered to her God’s blessing. And what a blessing this was to Hannah.

Amidst all the family and church dysfunction, God heard her prayer, Eli finally heard the prayer of her heart, and Elkanah listened to the needs of his wife. God blessed Hannah with the desire of her heart. And, in turn, she gave Samuel back to God.

**Facilitator:**

- Was there a point in this story where you had a strong emotional reaction?
- Did you have a sibling, or a family member, who was good at pushing your emotional buttons?
- Were there some “defining moments” in your life when people in your family or church misunderstood you or misjudged you or just were not there for you?
- Have these defining moments been surrendered to the Lord for His healing and redemptive work in your life? Or, did you make some unwritten agreements with yourself or with the enemy to try to protect and to guard yourself from ever feeling this way again?

**Leader:** When it comes to studying Scripture together, we can informally share our thoughts about the stories of Scripture or we can engage our hearts in the stories of Scripture. To engage our hearts with God and with those around us, we must allow ourselves to identify with the characters and issues dealt with in Scripture.

Engaging in heartfelt discussions surrounding Scripture and our lives’ stories may allow for a deeper knowing and understanding and

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appreciating one another. It may initially feel unsafe, unsettling, uncomfortable, and different if your group and relationships are newer. We cannot microwave trust and group cohesion. So take all the time you will need to build a safe, supportive small group.

Two fundamental ingredients to any healthy small group are commitment and confidentiality. If we each do not come regularly and participate openly in our group, there will not be much trust established in our group. Trust will grow when we consistently demonstrate a commitment to one another and to our group. Trust will also grow as we carefully protect the heartfelt sharing that goes on in our group. I can share my heart inside and outside the group, but I cannot share *your* heart or your stories outside the group.

Let's make an agreement to our group to be committed and confidential. As we carve out small group time into our schedules, let's devote ourselves to one another in brotherly and sisterly love.

### **Spiritual Lessons:**

- 1) What are some of the lessons we can learn about spiritual leadership from the first chapter of 1 Samuel? *(Take all the time you need to listen and to share what the Holy Spirit is teaching each of you. Then move on to #2.)*
- 2) God hears and responds to our prayers even when no one around us knows or understands our hearts. What are you begging God for in your prayers?
- 3) Frequently, our initial reactions to hurting people are not the best. We must remove the clutter and junk from our hearts and lives in order to respond compassionately to hurting people who need to experience God's tender love and care. What are some of the unhealed hurts in your own life that make it hard for you to get close to some of the people you are spiritually leading?

- 4) We have opportunities to listen to and to bless people each day if our eyes and ears and hearts are fully engaged in the work that the Holy Spirit wants to do in and around us. Who are the people around you who need to receive God's blessing through you?
- 5) We can join in and harass people just like everyone else does. Or we can become sensitive to the feelings, needs, and wounds of those around us and use words that bring comfort and life. When have you been insensitive to the wounds people around you have been carrying? How do you deal with insensitive people in your flock who bully, make fun of, dismiss, or sarcastically discard people who are hurting or are different? This will be the real test of your spiritual leadership!

*If you ignore these problems because of your discomfort and avoid confrontation, you will not have a safe place for people to come and connect, and heal, and grow together.*

We must lean into these difficult moments, speaking the truth in love, as Hannah did when the people around her just didn't get it. We must establish healthy communication boundaries and patterns that are substantially different from how people in our culture are being socialized. Otherwise, our spiritual communities won't be any different from the culture that people are being socialized by through their entertainment and social media.

**Prayer:** Lord, It's hard to know how to respond to hurting people. So often hurting people hurt people. Sometimes we are the hurting people who react out of our wounds. Other times we are the ones hurt by the words of others. Lord, give us the wisdom of Hannah to cry out to you from our heart when no one else seems to understand. Give us the grace to respond appropriately to people in need. Give us ears to hear beyond the words to know the needs in people's lives. Do not let us become hardened and calloused to people. Forgive us for being judgmental and critical of the people around us. May You fill our lives and our group with your enduring love and grace. In Jesus' Name. Amen.