

### Advent Through Her Eyes: Barrenness

My name is Hannah, and I wanted to share my story with you. Sharing our personal stories is one of the greatest gifts we can give one another. So, thank you for listening, as my prayer is that you will have a better understanding of who I am after our time together. My story is one of darkness and bitterness, emptiness and despair, and always longing to be validated as a woman. I am sure we have passed each other in the village; some of you have mocked me and even rejected me. Sometimes, I wonder what your thoughts are about me, if you feel sorry for me, or maybe you feel superior to me because you have given birth. Maybe you probably think God is punishing me; or that I have engaged in some horrific sin, and the consequence is my barrenness. I am a person, a woman, even though you may see me differently. My entire personhood is not directly related to my ability “to be with child.” I am woman enough, even though my body may tell you otherwise. I have even heard some of you whisper in front of me, “there she is, the barren one.” Yes, that is me - I am the barren one, the one without children.

My family life is very much like a drama. I am married to a wonderful man Elkanah, and oh how he does love me. But the fact remains, my husband is a bigamist. He does show favor upon me, one of his favorite ways is by giving me double portions of food. But, this is not enough. He does not know nor understand the spiritual pain and suffering I endure. However this does not excuse the behavior of Elkanah’s second wife Peninnah. She is the one who ridicules me, laughs at me, torments me because of my barrenness. I feel like a woman outside of my own home, my community. Women have such an amazing opportunity to nurture life, both inside and outside of the womb. I have even heard some people consider motherhood as the highest calling in life, it is no wonder I feel incomplete, a failure.

Every year as a family we travel together to Shiloh. Not because we have to, rather a desire to draw closer to God. A time of spiritual pilgrimage... a time of worship and sacrifice in our lives. Oh, how I love this time, a time for to focus on the Almighty God in my life, a time for me to pour out my heart and soul to Him.

My time at Shiloh is very intentional, a time of sanctuary, a time set apart where I can share the cries of my heart with God, of my longing to become a mother. A longing for my womb to be alive, to be filled with life, such that I would be included within a community, not segregated apart from it. My faithfulness to God has not waived; rather it is steadfast and persistent. I was bold in my prayers, as I vowed to God, that if I were to give birth to a son, I would devote him to the Lord. And I intend to keep my promise to God, as I am a woman of faith.

God has called us to share our hopes and dreams with him, and I have been a woman of faith, my faith has not waived just because God has not answered my prayers to become a mother. Sure there are times when I have cried myself to sleep, or not been able to eat, and at the darkest moments, I have even felt trapped in my own body, paralyzed. It is almost as if I'm unable to even function in my blackest moments.

My pleas to God were realistic and rather simple. In my mind, I was putting my own needs before God. God is the one who has closed my womb, therefore God is in control. My desire for children is a self sacrifice to give back to God. You know, it is not like I asked God for many children in our home, but rather, I begged him for just one child.

This is what it means to be real. This is what it means to recognize what it means to be a woman, a man and what that has to do with God. If we want a life with more than merely superficially glossing over feelings, ideas, or circumstances – than first we must deal with God. Looking back over the last few years I find that

I've not been led to see God in my story but to see my story in God's. God is the larger plot of my story and the larger plot of yours too.

But my story feels so unfinished. I keep waking up, day after day, hoping by some miracle that this time will be different. I keep walking by you and the other women of the village as they share how they named this child or that one. And it makes my blood boil when I hear the stage whispers of how that will never be a problem I have to deal with.

I get fed up with the complaints about losing sleep over nursing. What I would give to lose sleep because of a baby! Or to have to rub lotion on stretch marks! What I would give to not have to have the conversation, where I meet someone new, and she tells me about her kids, and then waits with an expectant expression when she asks about mine. Do you have any idea just how much I hate that moment when I explain that I don't have children, only to watch that awkward smile, and the only thing she can say in return is "oh , I see . . ."

No – you don't see! You don't see at all! You don't get one iota of my pain! You don't get my humiliation! Unless you've walked in these sandals, unless you've cried the tears I've cried, unless you've held the flesh of miscarriage, unless you've been barren too – you have absolutely no idea what my waking, on-going nightmare is like!

And it's not that I don't want to hear about your kids. I love children. With every fiber of my being, I love children. And it's why I want so badly to have a child of my own. Why do think this hurts so much? Why do think this pain grieves me so much! It's because I love children. Why do think I go to the temple, and go to Shiloh, and pray with all my heart? Why do you think I'm willing to be cast out as a babbling drunk? It's because I love children, and being barren is pain!!!

*Lord, God can you not see my pain? Why God are you neglecting me? Why will you not take action on my behalf? I've been told over and over again, that the decision is yours and not mine, but after all this time I can't but help to think that really the problem is me . . .*

*What have I done? What have I not done? If it's something I've done – I'll repent of it. If it's something I've not done, I'll do it.*

*But it is your decision God, and so I promise, I promise with all my heart, all my soul, all my strength – that if you would please, please, please simply grant me a child – I will dedicate that child to you . . . . Amen.*