

The Peninnah Syndrome
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As transcribed by Jane Vaughn

Today is what we have come to know as Mother's Day and so, here in church we naturally expect to take a look at and talk about mothers. We will do that – sort of. But we'll be looking at our topic from a little different perspective than we usually do.

I believe it is understood that mothers have a *natural* love – for their children. I mean, once that child is born, when you first look at the little helpless baby, there's nothing you couldn't or wouldn't do for him or her. It is always that way – a mother's love. It's immediate. There's no price too great! We just love our babies because we do – that's just the way we are.

I remember the incredible feeling that swept across my whole being when they laid my firstborn, Debbie, across my abdomen. I'd been watching her birth in a mirror and now I looked down at her with all those little black curls and I thought, "Oh, dear God! She doesn't know anything!" ☺ I really did. I thought, "Everything she learns, I have to teach her!" ☺ There's a great responsibility laid to us to teach and train and inform and impart and make this child ready to stand on its own one day. Thank God, it's a process, undertaken day by day, and only one step at a time. Today, I'm sure glad – she "passed me!" ☺ It just doesn't take long for them to grow up and know more than their parents.

Wouldn't it be a tremendous thing if we held that same responsible attitude...? Actually, it would be a *wonderful* thing – if – when we had "spiritual children" – we would feel that same kind of responsibility for *them*. That would be great! But instead, we usually hand them a tract and a Bible (at least the Gospel of John) and say, "Alright – you've met the Lord now. Be good – see you in Heaven!" ☺

The other, the preferable option, only happens when we nurture the spiritual newborns like mothers nurture their own children. And, men, if you're privately thinking, "Boy, I got off lucky *this* Mother's Day; she's not going to hit me with some heavy message." ☺ I remind you of Paul's statement when He said, "I care about you like a mother!" (see 1Cor.3:2; 2Cor.2:4; 6:13; 7:3; 12:14,15). He did, too! He *scolded* at times – when it was necessary (e.g. 1Cor.4:14; 5:1ff; 2Cor.2:1; 7:8,9; 13:10). He *threatened* them – "If you don't do some things right, I'm showing up!" (1:Cor.4:19-21) ☺ Okay, they're all worded a little different in the King James. ☺ But men, the truth is that *nurturing* is not a gender issue or a female responsibility in the Church or in a family! It falls to us all to minister to the "younger ones," even if it is simply by setting an example of a godly lifestyle.

So, we recognize motherhood today – what it is and what it stands for with all the sweet moments as well as the heartbreaks. And we can, and actually must, bring all of that into the spiritual realm of spiritual children – making the same applications.

I want to take you just a tiny turn today from how we usually look at 1 Samuel, chapter 1. You remember the story of Hannah's deep desire to be a mother. The scripture reads: "*There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim,*" (You know, when I read some of these things I just have to wonder, "Who cares?" ☺) "*of Mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph,*" (:pant::pant:: ☺) "*an Ephraimite:...*" Aren't you glad for simplicity when someone says to you, "What's your name, please?"

"*And he had two wives;*" (Well, there's the beginning of his trouble! ☺) "*the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. And this man*" (Elkanah, in case you've forgotten his name after all the pedigree that was given) "*went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh* (That's where the Tabernacle had been set up for worshipping the Almighty God before Jerusalem – see Josh. 18:1 – and an annual trip was required of all the men to bring sacrifices and offerings for themselves and their families – see Deut. 12).

And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there.” (I have no idea where or how that last bit of information fits – it’s just that: information. Maybe a woman wrote this book – we surely love all the details ☺). *“And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and daughters, portions. But to Hannah he gave a worthy (or, the word is actually “double”) portion; for he loved Hannah: but the Lord had shut up (or, had not opened) her womb.”*

“And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb.” (That’s women for you!). *“And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her;”* (Probably something like this: “Neener-neener-nee-ner! ☺ You don’t have any children! You poor thing!”) *“therefore she wept, and did not eat. Then said Elkanah, her husband, to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? And why eatest thou not? And why is thy heart grieved? Am not I better to thee than ten sons? So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk.*

Now Eli, the priest, sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the LORD. And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, ‘O LORD of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget Thine handmaid, but wilt give unto Thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life and there shall not razor come upon his head’ (He shall be as a Nazarite – Num.6).

“And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard;” (She was just praying silently). *“And Eli said to her, (verse 14), How long will you be drunk?”* This is fairly noteworthy: Eli, as the priest, hadn’t seen anyone pray fervently for so long, he accused her of being drunk! She offered him this explanation: *“No my lord, I am praying to God for a son. I promised God if He’d give me a son, I’d give the child back to the LORD. I am fervent in heart and spirit, not intoxicated!”*

Eli, now sensing the earnestness of her desire, tuned into God (Sometimes they do, those priests! ☺) and was able to say to her, “God is going to grant your desire.” A year later, Hannah had her son, and when he was weaned, she took Samuel to Eli as she had promised. She gave him to the temple for the training he would receive – there’s a whole sermon right there! – and that’s the story as we have known it – straight out of the scriptures.

Now let’s look at the same story as we haven’t known it before – from a different perspective. It’s not that one way of looking at the story is right and the other one wrong, but I want to talk to us about a syndrome. A syndrome is a group of signs or symptoms that collectively indicate some kind of a disorder. The syndrome I see here, I’ve labeled the *Peninnah Syndrome*. The Peninnah Syndrome is when someone believes that everyone else should have exactly the same things they do and should do everything the same way they do it.

The truth is, there still exists today, in the Church, this *Peninnah Syndrome*. I meet it everywhere I go. I see churches split over this attitude. You can hear them whine: “They don’t do it like we used to do it. They want to do things differently. *They* believe this and *we* believe that...” The difference in question, or under consideration, all too often comes down to something like this: “Are you gonna dunk ‘em or sprinkle ‘em on Sunday?” Or, “Is this wine or grape juice?”

All these *little* things (if I may so classify them) that we think are so important – that everyone should do it the same way – *my* way (of course!) – do not actually affect our eternity. But we gather around us – in the name of “This-is-what-we-believe” or, “This-is-how-we-do-it” – we gather around us *sameness*, or like people, who do it exactly as we do it. They think exactly as we think – and they will never judge one another because you can’t negatively judge someone who’s doing it just like you do it! We sometimes

call them “denominations.” Oh, is that already enough? A full plate? Do you just want me to just close this now – “in Jesus’ Name, Amen?”

Every year – they all go to the Feast together and Hannah hears the same thing: “Isn’t it interesting God hasn’t yet opened you up? I used to be like you, poor dear.” Have you never heard this Peninnah voice? “I used to not be able to pray publicly either. (Heh-heh-heh) Bless your dear little heart.” ☺

What I see here in this situation, is that Hannah foolishly bought into the Syndrome – she believed what Peninnah was saying. She *agreed* with it! You don’t have to fall for everything, my dear friends. Just suppose this – *what might God have done* with Hannah – had she not had children?

Oh, I can almost hear your thoughts now. “Oh, she’s anti-...” No, I think it’s a wonderful thing when God gives us children. It’s a wonderful thing when God gives us *anything*! *But, if we don’t learn to be satisfied with what we have*, we will look at someone else, compare *their gift* with our *seeming lack* – and then we’ll lament: “I want children just like Peninnah has!” even though Hannah has this incredible love bestowed upon her from her husband! “I love you! I love you! I don’t need anything more than...” God knows Elkanah didn’t need more kids! ☺ What he repeatedly said to her was: “I am totally satisfied with you, Hannah – just the way you are!” Oh, you didn’t catch that before. ☺

I like the way one contemporary Christian song starts and ends – it’s something like this: “You can think good things about me. You can tell me I’m wonderful – I can handle it... I know Who my source is...” It’s actually worded a little differently, but you get the drift. ☺ But that’s truly what God wants for us – that we trust Him as our source! That we receive from Him, just what we have right now. He says, “I am – content – with you!”

If we would tape-record our prayers on any given day and then played them back for our own listening pleasure, most likely we would be embarrassed! We ought to be, anyway. I really believe that. To hear the things we are *commanding God to do* – in Jesus’ Name (of course!) – and *for His glory* (obvious, isn’t it?). ☺ Instead of being grateful for who we are and what we are and what He has done with us and in our lives – because we don’t know what just might lie ahead of us – we decide how it should be, and beg Him to do it – exactly as we lay out the master plan. But – we are specifically, precisely *chosen* by God to be exactly what we are *at this moment* of our lives. May I re-state that? It is something like – “Quit kicking against the pricks!” ☺

Everything we are as individuals – everywhere we are as a church – right here – right now – God is in control and we are not outside of His plan (unless, of course, you are in gross sin! ☺). But, you can hear yourselves whine, if you will, “Oh God. Send the multitudes. We have all these prophetic words from so long ago. You promised! Besides God, we’ve got dreams – big dreams – and goals and aspirations, and we just know they came from You. And – we want it all fulfilled – like, yesterday!” ☺

The story of one church in particular tells the story of so many. Every step that has been taken – in moving from one city to another in a totally different part of the country, with a few families who grasped and embraced the vision, or, shared the vision, and said, “We’re coming with you, Pastor!” And they did. Every growing step has been important, and a part of the plan of God. They all made the geographical move, including finding homes and employment in the new region and getting their kids adjusted and into the new schools. And *some of them* even stayed with the vision! ☺ That also may mean some of them left you in the lurch! ☺ Well, that’s not unusual, Pastor. It happens all too often, and no one has to report the details to me – I’m just old ☺ and I’ve seen almost everything by now. ☺

Every step that has been taken in relocating that church – holding services in the school building – lugging all the sound equipment and other stuff every Sunday morning – “Get the speakers and let’s go into the school and set up the chairs and re-arrange the... and don’t forget the...” All those things that so many of us have done in pioneering a church are important parts of laying foundations. Believe me when I say, “That was all part of God’s plan!” Do you honestly think God is not big enough to have moved you

suddenly into a great big auditorium that was already in existence, freshly painted, fully equipped and wired, totally prepared just the way you needed it? Oh, yes. He's big enough!

But what if everything had fallen into *perfect* placement – with no effort on our part? Look at the lessons we wouldn't have learned! We even sing about that: “If I never had a problem, I wouldn't know that God could solve them. Through it all – through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus, I've learned to trust in God.” And in time, here we are in the new building! And guess what! It's beautiful! – but it's already too small! ☺ And we don't dare pray for anyone else to come unless they can walk! There simply are no parking spaces left! ☺ We need more land!

It's almost like – “Hey, God! Yoo-hooooo! Remember us? Where's the blueprint for this church?” It's up there – with Him. He's got the master blueprint – He has the plan. And He started it way back there in that other city. He knew exactly who to bring along to get this work started over here. Now, don't get mad at the people who leave – even if they've pledged all sorts of allegiance to you and the vision. *Scaffolding always is torn down when things are already built!* Selah! And it's not a sin to be scaffolding. Those people will go to another place and help them start to build – and then they'll be out of there too! By the way, they don't understand it either – it's just that they're – *called* – for a specific purpose. It's one of the gifts of God. People are going to walk out on you and you won't be able to figure it out at all – but hey! That's the way of the Church! ☺

So – what I'm trying to say to us today is – whatever gift you've been given, use it with all your might. If you lay it down or ignore the gift that God has given you – to be you – to be who you are supposed to be in the Body of Christ – it will manifest in other ways in your life – but *negatively*. Don't resist the plan of God because you think something else is better fitted for you.

Let me tell you another story – I believe it's instructive. A number of years ago, I was invited to a church and for the worship time they had an older lady at the piano who played with only two fingers – her two index fingers. ☺ She played only the lead notes for every song – every song! Now, this was a church about of about 300 members or so and I thought, “Why? Don't they have any talent here?” After the service, being shy like I am ☺, I went to the Pastor and meekly inquired: “Don't you have any people in this church who are gifted...?” I had already noticed there was an organ on one side of the platform, the piano on the other side and the organ was draped – as if it was dead. ☺ I continued my questions: “Don't you have any talent – any keyboard people?” The pastor responded so seriously, “Oh – we have a wonderfully gifted husband and wife team. He plays the organ and she plays the piano like you wouldn't believe!” I ventured one more question: “And they're not playing because...?” He said something like this: “Oh, Sister —” (I'll make up a name) “Sister Jones has been with us from the very beginning and we wouldn't hurt her feelings for anything.” I *boldly* said, “I would!” ☺ And, so I did. ☺

For the next service, I commissioned the husband and wife to go down to the keyboards and play. And that lady was so angry! She was insulted! Ranting loudly in her hurt and anger – out she went! Slam! And we had an anointed worship service. ☺ But, then to follow it up – I'm the one that hurt Sister Jones' feelings; consequently, I was responsible to do something about that. So, I took her on – as a prayer burden. And I was faithful to pray for God to heal her and do what only He could do. Eventually, she was prayed back into that church. It took a little doing, but it was worth it.

So you see, we have no right to say, “This is my gift! I've been here forever. I've been one of the faithful! I deserve the right to...” The demand is that we reward longevity: “You owe it to me to appoint me to be – a leader!” But, what if you're just not a leader? “I don't care if I am or not! Soon as you give me the title... I am!” ☺ It sounds humorous in the re-telling of the story, but it is anything but funny when it exists in your church!

Think it through, Church. “He giveth severally as He wills...” so the Good Book says (1Cor.12:7). But you are given a talent. Each one of His children is gifted by God. We're not all exactly the same in giftings and some have more than one gift. “Well, I sure don't know what mine is! I'm not musical... I

can't speak... When they call on me to give announcements, or pray aloud, I simply panic at the thought of having to say *anything*. I don't... I'm not... And besides, I'm not real emotional. I mean, I just... About all I can say is, 'Hullo. Good Morning,' – and I just don't know what my gift is." Of course you don't know what it is – you haven't unwrapped it yet!

One of the most dangerous answers to prayer can be, "Alright, I'm going to give you your desire." "Well, doesn't the Bible say, 'Delight yourself in the Lord and He'll give you the desires of your heart?'" Yes, it does (Ps.37:4). When you *delight yourself in the Lord*, you are praying for Him to give you the desires of *His* heart – so they become *your* desires. "Lord, give me the desires You want me to hold in my heart – show me what they are. I want what You want for me."

Remember the children of Israel? They complained and whined and fussed at Moses: "We don't like what we're eating. We're sick of this stuff that floats down from heaven. ☺ We need some meat. We want quail!" (see Ex.15:22ff; 16:2-8; Num.11:4-6) The Lord said, "I'm sick of hearing all that. So you want quail? You're going to get quail – and quail – and more quail – and more quail." You read it (Ex.16:11-13). How much quail did they get? It covered the camp! (I don't like dark meat either – how much of it can you eat? ☺)

But I know people that have *never opened* their own gift and they are so excited with what Peninnah has that they're constantly praying – fasting – on their faces – they are serious! I mean – it's not a *wrong* – it's not an *evil* – it's not an evil thing – to make your own requests or desires known to God. He knows it's a *serious desire*! "Oh, God! I want what she has! I want to be like... I want to have that... I want..." and God says, "You don't get it! If I give you what she has, then I have to bring in someone else to be what I wanted you to be!" Each of us has a place in the Body of Christ for which He has especially equipped us. The divine plan, my darlings, is much bigger than our little minds!

I opened this message by saying, "We are exactly and precisely in the right place – NOW!" And I know that's true. I've lived enough years to have hindsight, as they say, 20/20 vision. It is so clear – to look back through my life and say, "Oh, if I hadn't come through that, I wouldn't now..." "Oh, if I didn't..." "Oh! If I hadn't walked that dark tunnel, I wouldn't..." "Oh, if I hadn't precariously walked across that bridge..." "Oh, if I hadn't had that experience..." But I didn't say that during those times! Not while I was in the middle of them! Back then I got mad at what seemed like such negatives – just like you have – or do! ☺ And I threatened God that I might leave Him ☺ – and then where would He be? ☺

I'll tell you something important: *there's nothing more comfortable in life than accepting where you are and who you are right here in this moment*. That leaves plenty of room for growth and whatever He directs in changes later. But I am who God called me to be today. I am doing what God called me to do. I am going where God has called me to go. And right now, I only know my name for absolute certain and I'm looking for the ticket... Oh, not that one – I know I'm gong to Heaven! ☺ But there are so many curves along the way. Haven't you discovered that too? What do you know about blind alleys? Isn't it embarrassing to back out of one? ☺ Especially when you declared it was God as you made that turn! ☺ Well, you even had four prophetic words to back it up! ☺

Those are hard times to come back out of, but I've never come out of a blind alley that God didn't meet me right there as I emerged! And every time, I said (probably shouted), "Where were You?!" ☺ And He so gently would respond, "I wasn't going down there, I knew it was a dead-end! ☺ Anyway, I knew you'd come right back here because – there ain't no other outlet!" ☺

You can act like Hannah (1Sam.1:7) – refusing to eat. You can even call it "fasting." ☺ You can stamp your feet – and threaten God – but you see, He never, ever, has bought into a *syndrome*. Are you there? He knows the end from the beginning. And I love Isaiah 30:18 that says: "The Lord waiteth for thee that He may be gracious unto thee." What it means is: the Lord out-waits you every time! He can wait longer than you can pout or threaten to switch churches – because the very same thing He planned to do here – He will yet do! What did He say? "I am the Lord. I – change – *not*" (Mal.3:6).

“Hannah – do you really want a son? If that’s what you want to do with your life... I can see that you’re not going to be satisfied with anything else. You could have left the legacy for your – generation. Now you will have to do it vicariously through your child!” You’re not too old, my friend, this 76-year-old mother says. You’re not too old. If I was too old, I wouldn’t be *here!* ☺ When I get too old to be useful ::*phwitt::* I’m outta here! ☺ He promised me that! ☺ And you’re not too young – you’re not too inexperienced – you’re not too fat (besides, “the fat belongs to the Lord” Lev.3:16 ☺) – you’re not too skinny – you’re not too short – you’re not too tall – you’re not too feminine – you’re not too masculine. **You are just the way God made you!** “You mean I don’t have to change?” Aw – you *will* change. ☺ But you see what I’m trying to say is, you don’t know how to change to get where He’s taking you or wants you to go.

I could re-arrange the whole package and it still would stink. I don’t know how to make the changes. It’s not in man to do right or to know His ways (Jer.10:23; 5:14; 4:22; Rom.11:33; Heb.3:10; Pr.14:12). “What would you do to be different?” “Well, I... I’d... I’d duplicate her! I’d be skinny like her.” “Okay – then what?” “I don’t know – I’d just wanna be...” Do you hear me? Do you hear *you?*

Now, the same thing is true if you start going through the gifts – spiritual gifts (1Cor.12:1-11; Rom.12:3-8; Eph.4:11-13). “I know I have a gift of *this*, but I’d rather have the gift of *that*.” We’re just never satisfied with – what God has chosen for us! Not when we look at the person standing next to us – and want what they have. We must avoid buying into the *syndrome* that says we need to be the same – we need to be *equal*. God created us with varieties of gifts and talents and abilities – to suit His divinely ordained purposes. We’re supposed to be *different*.

There is no more exciting way for me to close this message than to read a poem. My mother wrote it long ago. Mother, who gave birth to six infants and raised five of us to maturity. They lost one early on, but we all were raised in the ministry during the Depression years. My parents, and the whole family, knew the many hardships of those times. When mother carried each one of us, she would lay her hands on her abdomen *daily* and say, “Lord, this child is Yours.”

Mother led the women’s groups in the various churches Dad pioneered and pastored, and did all the things that were permitted to be done by a woman in those days. So, this is not just a grouping of words that happen to rhyme. Out of the depths of her spirit, mother wrote the following:

*The Master was searching for a vessel to use;
on the shelf there were many – which one would he choose?
“Take me,” cried the gold one, “I’m shiny and bright;
I’m of great value and I do things just right.
My beauty and luster will outshine the rest
and for Someone like You, Master, gold would be best!”*

*The Master passed on with no word at all;
He looked at the silver urn, narrow and tall.
“I’ll serve You, dear Master; I’ll pour out Your wine,
and I’ll be at Your table whenever You dine.
My lines are so graceful, my carvings so true,
and silver will always compliment You.”*

*Unheeding, the Master passed on to the brass.
It was wide-mouthed and shallow, and polished like glass.
“Here! Here!” cried the vessel, “I know I will do.
Place me on Your table for all men to view.”*

*“Look at me,” called the goblet of crystal so clear.
“My transparency shows my contents so dear.
Though fragile am I, I will serve You with pride,
and I’m sure I’ll be happy in Your house to abide.”*

*The Master came next to a vessel of wood.
Polished and carved, it solidly stood.
“You may use me, dear Master,” the wooden bowl said,
“but I’d rather You used me for fruit – please, no bread!”*

*Then the Master looked down and saw a vessel of clay -
empty and broken it helplessly lay.
No hope had that vessel that the Master might choose -
to mend and cleanse – make it all His to use.*

*“Ah! This is the vessel I’ve been hoping to find,
I will mend it and use it – and make it all Mine!”*

*“I need not the vessel with pride of itself;
nor the one so narrow who sits on the shelf.
Not the one who is big-mouthed and shallow and loud;
nor the one that displays its contents so proud.
Not the one who thinks he can do all things just right –
but this plain earthen vessel, filled with My Power and Might.”*

*Then gently He lifted the vessel of clay –
mended and cleansed it and filled it that day.
Spoke to it kindly – “There’s work you must do.
You pour out to others – and I’ll pour in to you!”*

*Chosen Vessel
Mrs. B. V. Cornwall*