



Chapter 07

Hannah & Hope

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UNDERSTANDING

What do I need to know about this passage?

Have you ever wanted something so deeply that it consumed you? What happened if you didn't get what you wanted? How did it affect you? How did you feel if you watched others get it instead? Did you start feeling jealous? Maybe you started to question God's goodness, wondering if He cares about you when He seems to care about everyone else.

Although Hannah had many good things in her life, she likely grappled with these same feelings. She had a good desire in her heart, but day after day, year after year, that longing went unmet. She saw others get what she wanted, and it only made her feel worse. Did God care about her the way He cared about others?

Although Hannah's heartache was constant, she never gave in to despair. Instead, she brought her questions and her sadness to God, confident that He would provide. Hannah helps us understand the virtue of hope, which anchors us in God's promises and guards us from discouragement.

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It is natural to want good things—finding our vocation, getting a promotion, having a child, overcoming an addiction. But when those things don't happen, it can be tempting to allow ourselves to be overcome by sadness and think that our plight in this world is the end of the story. Hannah shows us that, no matter our circumstances we can both fully enter into our sorrows and grief and also have confidence that, one day, we can find true happiness and fulfillment in God. Hannah's hope made her generous toward God, allowing her to give back to Him all He had given to her. Let's explore her story to learn more about the virtue of hope.

Hannah

Hannah lives in a society where children are not only a blessing but essential for the family's economic survival. Women who were unable to conceive were often seen as punished by God or inferior. Hannah knows she is one of these women. She has been married for years without conceiving a child. Not only does she long to become a mother, but she likely suffers from her community's perception of her.

Hannah's relationships at home compound the issue. Her husband Elkanah, unfortunately, has another wife, Peninnah, who has given birth to many children, and Peninnah mercilessly

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mocks Hannah's childlessness, rubbing salt in the wound of her pain and disappointment.

These difficult years culminate on a trip to worship God in the temple. Elkanah offers sacrifices and, when he returns, gives his family a portion of the sacrifice. When Hannah sees Peninnah's many portions for herself and her children, she can no longer contain her anguish. She breaks down into tears and refuses to eat.

At this point, Hannah likely wonders if the stigmas were true. Was God punishing her? Did He care about her desires? Was there something wrong with her?

Yet Hannah refuses to let despair overtake her. She runs to the temple, falls on her knees, and begins to pray, "O Lord of hosts, if you will regard the troubles of your handmaid and will remember me, and not forget your handmaid, and you will give your handmaid a son, then I will dedicate him to the Lord for his entire life" (1 Sam 1:11).

Hannah finishes her prayer and—this is crucial—leaves in peace. Her desire to have a child didn't disappear because she prayed. But, by entrusting her desires and her grief to God, she places everything she wants in His hands. She trusted Him, His goodness, and His will for her life, and left the temple with serenity. Whether or not she

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ever had a child, she had confidence that God would ultimately bring about what was best for her.

God, however, does respond to Hannah's pleas. Shortly afterward, she conceives and gives birth to her son and names him Samuel. Filled with gratitude, Hannah keeps her promise and brings Samuel back to the temple to grow up under guidance of the priest. God gave Samuel as a gift to Hannah, and so Hannah gave him back to God in return, entrusting him and his life to God in the same way that she had entrusted her own longings to His loving care.

When she brings Samuel to the temple, Hannah breaks into a song of joy, proclaiming, "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in the Lord. My mouth derides my enemies, because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy like the Lord, there is none besides thee; there is no rock like our God" (1 Sam 2:1-2).

Samuel grows up in God's presence and becomes a pivotal figure in Israel. He serves as the last judge of Israel and ushers God's people into the period of the kings. Samuel would anoint Saul as the first King of Israel, and eventually anoints king David as well, through whose family line Jesus Christ would enter the world. If Hannah didn't cling to hope in her hour of greatest darkness, there

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might never have been a Samuel, and his impact on God's plan of salvation would have been lost.

Hannah's example of the virtue of hope shows us how to handle life's unavoidable tragedies and disappointments. Her assurance was not in herself, or the goods of this world, but in God. The virtue of hope enabled Hannah to endure her sufferings with an eternal perspective and, in the end, her hope did not disappoint. Let's dive into the virtue of hope and learn how we can not only follow Hannah's example, but also discover how we, as disciples of Christ, can build upon the natural hope that Hannah possessed and embrace the supernatural virtue of hope that comes to us in baptism.

Hope

Hope is "the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit" (CCC 1817).

As human beings, we have many desires—bodily desire for food and rest, a drive to create and accomplish, eagerness for fun and adventure, and a longing for certain relationships to work out. At a natural level, it is appropriate for us to hope for these desires to be fulfilled—to pass the test, to find our spouse, to have a happy marriage, to stay healthy, or to succeed in our career.

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But in this fallen world, we often experience the opposite—failure, sadness, pain, unmet wants and needs, and broken relationships—and it is understandable that we may feel overwhelmed sometimes by our unfulfilled desires and start to think we will never be truly happy because some aspect of life remains a source of constant hurt or frustration. We can also be tempted to make natural goods our primary pursuit, thinking that only getting married, being successful, starting a family, fitting in with the right crowd or having a certain amount of money will lead to the happiness we desire.

While the things of this world can bring a certain amount of happiness into our lives, they cannot satisfy the deepest desires of our hearts. As St. Augustine famously said, "restless are our hearts until they rest in you." And the more we cling to earthly goods as the sole source of our happiness, the more devastated we are when we don't get what we want. Such pain and sadness can lead to giving up, chronic discouragement, and even despair.

The man of hope, however, is buoyed up and able to face the hardships of life, knowing that, in the end, Christ will satisfy his deepest longings. He presses forward to overcome pain and sadness, because of his confidence that, if he remains faithful, he will arrive at his heavenly home where all desire will be fulfilled, and Christ "will wipe

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away every tear from [his] eyes” (Rev 21:4). Hope is a “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” that prevents the hopeful man from being tossed about by the “waves” he faces in life—a difficult breakup, the loss of job, the suffering of a family member (CCC 1820). Like St. Paul, the hopeful man can say, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom 8:18).

Having hope guards against two vices:

Despair: Despair is the loss of hope, believing that God will not provide for our needs. This can happen in dramatic ways, like when someone uses drugs to numb the pain in their life, but it can also happen in moments of everyday life, like when we overeat or use pornography to suppress our loneliness, give in to busyness and workaholism to fill our time, scroll on our phone to distract us from a wound in our marriage, or give up on serving Christ and His Church because we think that the world is just too broken and will never change. When we despair, we can tell ourselves that things will never get better, that we are all alone, and that there is no use in trying. We may even give up on prayer or receiving the sacraments.

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Presumption: The second vice is presumption. Instead of placing our confidence in God and trusting that He will satisfy our hearts, presumption leads us to place our trust in ourselves and our own ability to achieve happiness. In its most extreme form, presumption can mean thinking and acting like we deserve God’s mercy and forgiveness, even without repentance. But it can also come in simpler forms, such as increasing our dedication to our career, confident that if we just try harder, we will get what we want out of life. Presumption can make us appear hopeful insofar as it drives us forward to overcome life’s obstacles, but such progress rests on our own abilities and steals from our only true source of hope: God Himself. When we presume, we choose self-reliance over dependence on God, which can lead to overconfidence, entitlement, and spiritual laziness.

The longer Hannah went without a child, the more painful her life became. Yet she didn’t despair, losing all hope in a fulfilling future, or presumption, ignoring God to try to get what she wanted. Instead, she brought her grief to God, trusting in Him alone as the source of her peace. When Hannah conceives Samuel, she even became an icon of hope:

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An image of ... hope is the pregnant woman. She often feels sick, the slender shape that she has spent so much energy preserving has become thick and puffy; her emotions are playing tricks on her; her legs and back are sore, she gets tired easily, she feels the pain of the baby kicking.... Yet a pregnant woman is typically not dejected and despairing; quite the reverse. She is filled with plans, she is often happy, she speaks of her suffering with a certain wry humor.... She is thinking of a new life and what that new life will mean.... And the very hardships of pregnancy, the growing burden of the child, are signs that feed her hope.¹

What about you? Perhaps you hope to get into a specific graduate school or enter a competitive career. You might have an idea of the kind of lifestyle, income, or home you want to have. Perhaps you long to become a husband or a wife, a father or mother. Maybe you want to excel in a certain sport or art form. What will you do if things don't turn out as you expect? How will you handle the inevitable interruptions and curveballs that derail your dreams? If you

¹ Habinger Institute, *True Leadership*, pp. 47-48.

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allow the Holy Spirit to increase your hope, you will not be overcome by life's disappointments. Hope will anchor you in Christ and allow you to face life's challenges, confident that, in the end, God will provide for your every need.

Application: Indomitability

Most of us have noble intentions. We want to live well, know God, obey Him, serve others, and live a life of virtue. But this life, while filled with beauty and goodness, remains a "valley of tears." We want to get married, but we can't seem to find our spouse. We struggle with an addiction that seems impossible to break. Out of nowhere, someone we love dies. In these situations, we can be tempted to believe that life is too hard, that we will never be fulfilled, and that maybe we should just give up.

Indomitability is the virtue by which we are not deterred or dominated by the challenges we face in life. Hope enables us to become indomitable because it allows us to view life's difficulties in the light of eternity. This earthly life includes real sorrow, fear, grief, and suffering, and being virtuous does not mean suppressing these feelings. Rather, indomitability enables us to continue doing the good, even in the face of life's challenges and sorrows—when we may not see how doing so will make any difference, failure seems inevitable,

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or we do not think we have what it takes. Think of a parent with a special needs child, who takes care of them every day, knowing that that child may never be able to say thank you and the hardships of caretaking are exhausting. Or think about someone who struggles with a broken relationship that may never be repaired. It can be right and good to lament in these situations. Yet indomitability strengthens us to continue striving for what is good amidst our difficulties and not allow resistance, sadness, grief, or setbacks deter us from pursuing what is right.

Indomitability looks like doing our best work and treating our co-workers well, even when our work environment is difficult and we feel pressure to perform. Or like preserving in prayer for a loved one who has left the Church, refusing to give up hope that they might one day turn back to Christ. It might look like playing very hard in a sport, continuing to battle and giving our best, even when we are playing against a great team that is well in the lead. Or it may mean loving and serving our family, even when our own hearts are burdened by the difficulties we are enduring in those relationships.

Consider your own life. How do you react when life seems impossible, tedious, or doesn't seem to fulfill your desires? Indomitability frees us to bring our sadness, anger, frustration, grief,

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and pain to the Lord and not be overcome by these feelings, so that we can do what is good, remaining constant in loving God and others.

We can grow in indomitability through small daily actions. We can choose to stay faithful to prayer, even when we know we have seriously sinned or God feels distant. We can decide to keep giving generously to others, even when it seems like the least satisfying thing in the world. We can choose to pursue virtue, even after we've fallen for what seems like the thousandth time. And we can share the truth of the Gospel, even when others resist us, ridicule us, and when remaining faithful and zealous leaves us feeling empty.

As we grow in this virtue, we will begin to embody St. Paul's words: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (2 Cor 4:8-10).

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DISCUSSION

1 Samuel 1:1-18
 1 Samuel 1:19-28
 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Discussion guide for your Bible study

01. Launching Question: Have you ever wanted something so deeply that it consumed you? If you ended up getting it, did it give you the happiness that you thought it would? If you didn't get it, how did that affect you?

Please read aloud:

It is natural to want good things—finding our vocation, getting a promotion, having a child, overcoming an addiction. But when those things don't happen, or are delayed, it can be tempting to allow ourselves to be overcome by sadness and think that our plight is the end of our story. Yet God does not abandon us in these circumstances. Instead, He offers us hope.

Share a brief introduction to the theological virtue of hope (“the virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness,” it “responds to the aspiration to happiness which God has placed in the heart of every man”). Refer to CCC 1817-1818.

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In the Book of First Samuel, we find a woman who is familiar with the struggle against despair. She has many good things, but she also has a great desire that goes unmet—day after day, year after year. She sees others get what she wants, and it only makes her feel worse. Yet, she responds with hope.¹ Let's explore her story to learn more about this great virtue.

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-18

02. What is Hannah's great desire that has, thus far, gone unmet? What do you think this must have been like for her?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: Hannah has been unable to conceive a child, though her husband's other wife, Peninnah, has conceived several and mocks Hannah's infertility. This would have been a long, humiliating and degrading experience intensified by the fact that women without children were often seen as punished by God or inferior in the culture of that time.

03. What does Hannah do with her unmet desire?

¹ Note that while Hannah possesses hope in God, her hope is still of a lower order than the theological virtue of hope that Christ pours into our hearts in baptism.

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Answer: She runs to the temple, falls on her knees, and turns over her desire to God.

04. How do you respond when God doesn't seem to fulfill your desires, especially those closest to your heart?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud:

At a natural level, it is appropriate for us to hope for good things—to pass the test, to find our spouse, to stay healthy, to succeed in our career. It can be tempting, however, to make these good but passing things our sole pursuit in life, imagining “if I only had fill-in-the-blank, I would finally be happy.”

05. In a similar way, Hannah would have been tempted to make a potential child the sole condition of her happiness and fulfillment. But let's look closely. Does her happiness seem to depend on attaining her desire? Why or why not?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: Hannah's happiness does not seem to depend on attaining her desire because she attains peace, and this is crucial, before receiving it. Her desire to have a son doesn't disappear, but by entrusting her desire to God,

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she finds peace. Whether or not she ever has a child, she seems to have confidence that God will ultimately bring about what is best for her.

Please read aloud:

Having hope requires that we guard against two vices.

The first vice is despair. The despairing man loses all hope, believing that God will not provide for his needs. He tells himself that things will never get better, that he is alone, and that there is no use in trying.

The second vice is presumption. The presumptuous man, on the other hand, has a kind of hope, but it isn't hope in God. It's hope in himself and his own ability to achieve happiness. In short, he avoids despair by doing things “his way.” In its most extreme form, the presumptuous man can think and act like he deserves God's mercy and forgiveness, even without repentance.

06. How do we know that Hannah isn't despairing or being presumptuous in this situation?

Answer: Because Hannah finds peace before “things get better,” it's obvious that she doesn't despair. We know that Hannah is not

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presumptuous because she turns to the Lord in her need instead of relying on her own power.

07. What about you? Are you more prone to despair, thinking your happiness depends upon some worldly outcome? Or are you more prone to presumption, assuming you “have what it takes” to be happy without God’s help or grace?

Allow the group to discuss.

08. Hannah certainly hopes in God, but she does not possess the theological virtue of hope, which comes to us in baptism. How is Christian hope superior to the hope that Hannah has?

Answer: Hannah’s hope is aimed at good worldly things, while theological hope, because of the Resurrection of Christ, hopes for eternal life and salvation. The theological virtue of hope is infused into our souls at baptism. It “does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5).

(Optional) Please read aloud:

Hannah, being a pregnant woman, is actually an image of hope. A pregnant woman often feels sick,

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the slender shape that she has spent so much energy preserving has become thick and puffy; her emotions are playing tricks on her; her legs and back are sore, she gets tired easily, she feels the pain of the baby kicking.... Yet “A pregnant woman is typically not dejected and despairing; quite the reverse. She is filled with plans, she is often happy, she speaks of her suffering with a certain wry humor.... She is thinking of a new life and what that new life will mean.... And the very hardships of pregnancy, the growing burden of the child, are signs that feed her hope.”¹

Please read aloud:

Let’s continue the story and see what becomes of Hannah’s hope.

Read 1 Samuel 1:19–28

09. What does Hannah receive in the end? What does Hannah do after receiving what she’s always desired?

Answer: She is finally blessed with a son, Samuel. She offers him to the Lord in fulfillment of her promise and gives God her thanks and worship.

Please read aloud:

Hannah’s gift of Samuel marks a hard-won moment for her, one that was years of patient suffering in

¹ Habinger Institute, *True Leadership*, pp. 47-48.

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the making. Most of us have similar aspirations. We want to live well, know God, obey Him, serve others, and live a life of virtue. This is easier said than done. While our earthly lives are filled with beauty and goodness, they remain a “valley of tears.”

The virtue that allows us to continue striving for what is good is called indomitability. The indomitable man refuses to be deterred or dominated by life’s challenges. He presses on, hoping in God and viewing difficulty and setbacks in light of eternity.

10. Consider your own life. How do you react when choosing the good seems unpleasant, tedious, or even impossible? Does it crush your spirit and throw you off the path? How hard are you to “dominate,” so to speak, to deter from a virtuous decision?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud:

We can grow in indomitability through small daily actions. Examples include staying faithful to prayer despite having sinned, giving generously despite feeling nothing as we do it, fighting an addiction even after we’ve fallen for what seems like the thousandth time, or persisting in mission despite it seeming fruitless. Through these small, daily acts, we can become people who persevere, in hope, to the end.

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11. How can hope help us be more indomitable, more able to persevere in doing good despite life’s challenges?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: Hope enables us to become indomitable because it allows us to view life’s difficulties in the light of eternity. We know Christ will be victorious, so we can place our total confidence in His plan for our lives, even if that plan involves hardship and suffering.

Please read aloud:

Because of Hannah’s indomitable spirit, she perseveres to the end. Her desire for a child is also satisfied, and she fulfills her vow to God in return. When Hannah brings Samuel to the temple, she also breaks into a song of victory and praise, which we’ll read now.

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Please read aloud:

The Song of Hannah, which prefigures Mary’s Magnificat in the Gospel of Luke, is an elegant testimony to the virtue of hope.

12. Think about some of the themes we’ve touched on in this study: Not placing our ultimate hope in worldly goods;

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resisting despair and presumption; and living as indomitable disciples of the Lord. How are these themes captured in the Song of Hannah?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answers may include:

Not placing our hope in worldly goods:

- “My heart exalts in the Lord”
- “There is no rock like our God”
- “Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread”

Against presumption:

- “For not by might shall a man prevail”
- “The bows of the mighty are broken”

Against despair:

- “He raises the poor up from the dust...”
- “He will guard the feet of his faithful ones”

Indomitability:

- “The feeble gird on strength”
- “The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces”

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Please read aloud:

As is a theme in this study, Hannah’s virtue will end up blessing not only her own life, but the world. Samuel grows up in God’s presence and becomes a pivotal figure in Israel. He serves as the last judge of Israel and ushers God’s people into the golden age of the kings. Samuel would anoint Saul as the first King of Israel, and eventually anoints king David as well, through whose family line Jesus Christ would enter the world.

13. Write a final application question about how to apply the virtue of hope to one’s own life.