

SERIES: CHRISTMAS CHEER
PART 1: CHRISTMAS CHEER WHEN YOU'RE
DEPRESSED

The Bible is very clear that there are such high expectations attached to Christmas because of the purpose of Christmas. The first mention of the purpose and the need for Christmas might surprise many of us. The first pronouncement or inauguration of Christmas is stated by Father God after the temptation, deception and fall of the first human couple, Adam and Eve. God says in Genesis 3:15 to the serpent, who represents satan, **“And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike His heel.”** What was God talking about here in Genesis 3:15?

Father God was making a bold statement that He would have the last word concerning His human family, not satan, and not Adam and Eve. He declares that there will be a perpetual struggle between satanic forces and His human family, as well as their respective offspring or seeds. The offspring of the woman includes Cain, then humanity at large, and then Jesus Christ and all those who will put their trust and faith in Him. The offspring of satan includes demons and anyone who rejects Jesus Christ and serves the kingdom of darkness. God says that satan has the ability to cripple the human family (you will strike the heel), but the Seed, Jesus Christ, would deliver the fatal blow (He will crush your head).

Christmas is when the full-frontal attack against satan begins and is accomplished through Jesus' birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection. The attack continues now through His church, and the result of His work on the cross will be consummated when Jesus Christ returns, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Mary becomes pregnant while engaged to Joseph, but the child Mary carries is not his. An angel is dispatched to let Joseph know that the baby his beloved carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 1:21-23 the angel says, **“And she will have a Son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”**²² **All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through His prophet:**²³ **“Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a Son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means “God is with us.””** In Luke 1:35, the angel says to Mary, **“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy.”** In Luke 2:10-11, the angel says to the shepherds in the fields, **“I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.”**¹¹ **The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David.”**

Then there was a man, Simeon, who was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit was upon him and told him that he would not die until he sees the Lord’s Messiah. The Holy Spirit led Simeon to the temple the

exact day that Mary and Joseph came to present Jesus to the Lord as the law required. Simeon sees Jesus and takes Him in his arms and says, **“²⁹Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. ³⁰I have seen your salvation, ³¹which you have prepared for all people. ³²He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and He is the glory of your people Israel!’ ³³Jesus’ parents were amazed at what was being said about Him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby’s mother, ‘This Child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but He will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose Him. ³⁵As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.’” (Luke 2:29-35)**

You can see both in the beginning at the first Christmas to today that people have high expectations when it comes to the Christmas season. There are those who truly believe in Jesus, and they have high expectations that He is going to do something great and spectacular in their lives, their family, their church family and community. There are those who deny that Christmas even exists, and they want to stop all expectations and celebration.

Then there are those who have experienced profound hurt, trauma and problems in the past, and it still discolors their ability to truly tap into the CHEER of this marvelous season. My purpose through this exciting series, CHRISTMAS: CHEER, is to be able to encourage, empower and equip every one of you to learn how you can place your faith in Jesus and

open your hearts and minds to the Hope, Confidence, Courage, and Joy that God wants you to experience.

I want to look with you for a few moments at the **Five Action Steps you can take to discover God's cheer, courage and calm when you're depressed**, when you're feeling down, and you just feel like you have run out of hope for your situation this season. The story we're going to look at to find some help for what we need is about Hannah and the depression that she struggled with. Her story is found in 1 Samuel 1:1-28. If you have your Bible, I encourage you to turn to the book of 1 Samuel. It is in the O.T., and it is the sixth book in the O.T.

This is a precious story of a woman named Hannah. She was one of two wives to a man named Elkanah. Every year Elkanah and his two wives would go to the temple to worship. It was always painful for Hannah because Peninnah would be given extra portions of meat to sacrifice, because she had children, and Hannah would only get one portion, because she was barren. Our text says that Peninnah would taunt Hannah every year. This would cause her to experience a serious case of depression, just like many of us experience during the Christmas season. Every year when the holiday season comes, many of us experience the same old pain. The same old hurts. The same old heartaches. The same loneliness. The same stress. The same financial issues. All the stress and tension begins to stack up in our lives, and it's easy to sort of drift down into that holiday depression.

From Hannah's story there are five actions that she took that can help us to experience God's gift of Hope. Each action will take a decision on your part.

The first action step that God encourages us to take so that we can access His hope when we're depressed is to:

I. Acknowledge what you're actually feeling

1 Samuel 1:5-8, 10, 15; Proverbs 15:13; Philippians 4:6

That means you stop. You stop running from what you feel, and you stop denying it. Especially if you're depressed. This gives you time to reflect on what you are thinking and what has happened that can help you figure out why you're feeling what you're feeling. Here's our tendency. Our tendency is to think, "I shouldn't be feeling this way." In 1 Samuel 1:6-7, the Bible says that **"Peninnah would taunt Hannah and make fun of her because the Lord had kept her from having children. ⁷Year after year it was the same— Peninnah would taunt Hannah... and Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not eat."**

Proverbs 15:13 says, **"A glad heart makes a happy face; a broken heart crushes the spirit."** When your heart hurts, depression comes. Depression is an automatic, universal, even expected response to heartache. It doesn't matter what caused the heartache. The key in this stage of dealing with depression, sadness, hurt, and loss is to get very clear on what it is you're feeling and why you're feeling what you are. I, you, must be honest and not play the denial game and go, "I

don't know why I am feeling this way.” This is the work you must engage in. Be honest with what it is you're feeling, and dig into why you're feeling that way. Hannah admitted how she was feeling. She cried. She quit eating. She felt humiliated and shamed because she couldn't give birth to a child. So the first step to healing is admitting how I'm feeling and gain perspective on why I am feeling the way I am.

II. Access people who are safe

1 Samuel 1:9-10; Psalm 26:12

The second action that is important for you to take is to find that person or persons who are safe enough for you that they will allow you to explore with them what you're feeling and why you might be feeling what you are without judgment and criticism or an easy, “Here is how to fix it.”

Hannah knew where that safe place was for her. 1 Samuel 1:9-10, **“Once after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance of the Tabernacle.¹⁰ Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord.”**

Here at CVCHURCH our focus is on developing fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ who create a place to belong and a place to become, which means you can find someone who is safe to start unpacking what you're feeling and where you're hurting.

Your safe place can look like a lot of different things. It can be your small group. It can be in one of our worship services. We have three services on a weekend. Our first service is our Celebrate Recovery service Friday night at 7:00 P.M. It is led by a very capable leader, Scott Alvarez. They have great worship, and we have a faithful leadership team that serves with them, plus all of the precious people who attend. That is a safe place for people. Your safe place can be a personal friend that you trust to listen to you and to tell you the truth in love. But you need at least one. In fact, at a minimum, I think you need more than one. You need (1) a place where you can express your worship to God. And, (2) you need a small group where you can openly express your struggles with others.

Many of you have been a part of a small group. And, many of you have discovered what a safe place that can be. Others of you, just to be honest, you're not quite sure about that yet. I want to say to you, "Don't quit." Sometimes it takes a while for a place to become safe for you. So I'm encouraging you either to stay in your group or to get in a group and give it a good run. Because there's going to be a day when you're really glad you did.

My wife and I cherish our small group. The reason we love it so much is it's a safe place. Over the years, Kathe and I have seen people willingly begin to remove their masks and to let go of much of the pretense that most of us use to relate to others. We're just who we are. Because we care so much about each other regardless of what's said, we're there. We're

together for the journey. So I need to admit how I feel. I need to find a safe place. And here's the third...

III. Ask God for help

1 Samuel 1:10-11, 15-16; Romans 12:1-2

Hannah asked God for His help. Read with me what she prayed, **“Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. ¹¹And she made this vow: ‘O Lord of Heaven’s Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to You. He will be yours for his entire lifetime....’** ...^{15b}**‘I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the Lord. ¹⁶Don’t think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow.’”**

Romans 12:1-2 in the Message version says this, **“Take your everyday ordinary life, your sleeping, eating, going to work and walking around life, and place it before God as an offering. Fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out.”** If I have the option, if I can fix my attention, that means I get to decide where it lands. When I decide to turn my attention towards God, what happens is I get the focus off myself—because I can’t give my attention to two things at the same time. When I fix my attention on God I start to change from the inside out. And how I feel is affected by what direction I choose to face.

So how do I do that? How do I turn my attention towards God? I invite Him to be part of whatever I'm dealing with. Here's how Hannah did that. Verse 10, "**She was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord.**" I am not talking about the easy, catch all, cover all, simplistic Christian answer, "Pray about it;" I'm talking about taking prayer to the level that Hannah did. She described it like this in verse 15, "**I was pouring out my heart to the Lord.**"

So what happens when you pour out your heart? When you pour out your heart you make enough room to let God completely in. You're not holding anything back. You're admitting that you don't have all of the answers for your pain and depression. In fact, you're admitting you probably don't have any answers at all. But you know God does. So you're going to focus your attention on Him.

How long has it been since you've done that? You know when you were so down in the dumps, when life had stacked on you so much that you completely opened up to God and you dumped it all on Him. Because that's what I'm telling you to do during the holidays if you get the blues and get down in the dumps. I want you to dump it all on God. Because the God I know and the God I love and the God who loves me and the God who loves all of you is big enough to take it and handle it and still love you at the same time.

1) Admit how you feel to yourself, to God and another person. 2) Access people who are safe. 3) Ask God for help.

IV. Admit to someone you trust that you're hurting

There were two people that Hannah confided in. The first person was her husband. Verse 8 says, **“Why are you crying Hannah? Elkanah would ask. ‘Why aren’t you eating? Why be downhearted just because you have no children? You have me—isn’t that better than having ten sons?’”** It is possible to read what Elkanah said in several different ways. What we do know is that to not be able to give birth was seen as being cursed by God. God wasn’t cursing her, but she most likely took it that way. Her husband was saying, “I love you with or without children. I couldn’t love you more, Hannah, even if you had ten sons. I know you want children and, Hannah, I want that for you. But even if it never happens, we do have each other. So Hannah, could you maybe just maybe, and I know this won’t be easy, but could you just take a moment and let’s look at what we do have instead of what we don’t have?”

I have found that it is so much easier for us to see what’s missing—for us to see what we don’t have than what we do have. And that’s true with every aspect of life. It’s easier to see what we don’t have than what we do have.

The 2nd person was the priest. In verse 17 he says to her, **“May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of Him.”** Eli confessed her confession. He agreed with her that God will answer her prayer. We need people to stand in agreement with us, who will take up our battle and fight with us. Loved ones, you won’t get over your depression by

yourself. You need others to love you, speak the truth to you and encourage you to trust Jesus and to stand strong and not give up.

The last action you need to take is to...

V. Accept that God wants to help you, and He will

1 Samuel 1:18

After Hannah acknowledged what she was actually feeling, and she accessed the safe people in her life, and she asked God for His help, and she admitted to those she trusted that she was hurting, she truly accepted the fact that God wanted to help her and would help her. This is called HOPE. The N.T. word for hope, “Elpis”, means to have a confident expectation or a solid assurance that God will come through for you, because He already has in sending Jesus Christ to save you from your sins and to adopt you into His family. He will not abandon you now. Accept the fact that He has heard you pouring out your heart to Him when you make the decision to do so and then you have hope that He will answer.

After Eli the priest blessed Hannah, here was her response in verse 18, **“Oh, thank you, sir!” She exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad.**” She took these five action steps and she pulled out of her bitter anguish, shame, humiliation, and depression and expected God to act on her behalf after she prayed. If you read the entire story, you find out that God did respond to her request, and she made good on her promise to give Samuel

back to Him as a priest. Psalm 34:5, **“Those who look to Him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces.”**

Without any question, I know what my heart is longing for and what your heart is longing for is Jesus. If you’ve not yet come to a place in your life where you’ve invited Him into the process of your life, God’s waiting for you to do that this morning (afternoon)—for you to just say “yes” to Him. It’s not terribly complicated. You just say, “Dear God, I don’t understand everything about life. I’m not even sure, God, I understand everything about You. But I do know, God, that I want You to be part of all of my struggles and my pain and my blues and my depression in life. God, I want to live the rest of my life for You.”

Right now, would you say something like this, “Dear God, right now, I invite You into my life. I don’t understand everything about my life. I’m not sure, God, I understand everything about You. But I do know God that I want You to be part of my life and help me to live for You the rest of my life.”

“Father, in this room there are people who just prayed that prayer. We celebrate with them, we rejoice with them because in this moment, God, not only have they sealed their eternity in heaven, but they have discovered a Savior and Lord and Leader to guide them through all of the valleys of life and to be with them and celebrate with them when they’re on the mountains. God, it is my prayer that they will

know the richest of the blessings of life that You have to offer and how You are always faithful. In Jesus' name. Amen.”

Let me give you the sermon in a sentence: In the middle of all her depression Hannah turned to God for help, which teaches me that experiencing God's cheer, joy, hope and courage IS A CHOICE. **To walk in Christmas Cheer is a choice.**

COMMUNION

“As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then He broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, ‘Take this and eat it, for this is My body.’²⁷ And He took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, ‘Each of you drink from it,²⁸ for this is My blood, which confirms the covenant between God and His people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many.’” Matthew 26:26-28