

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, July 16, 2023

Fretting

1Samuel 1:6 “And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her **fret**, because the LORD had shut up her womb.”

Today we will consider the matter of fretting, a thing that is common to all humans, as we grapple with our proud, fearful, desirous flesh. Regardless of the particular cause, we can find our hearts suddenly consumed with fretting. Sometimes our fretting passes as quickly as it comes, but sometimes we can fret for hours, days, weeks, years – fruitlessly grinding the same issue over and over and over. Let us consider the scripture to see what help our gracious Father provides us to grapple with this sinful ailment.

What is fretting?

Dictionary:

- To feel or express worry, annoyance, discontent, or the like
- To be constantly or visibly worried or anxious
- To cause corrosion; to gnaw into something
- To torment, irritate, annoy, or vex

Bible usage:

- Some form of the English word “fret” appears 12 times in the Bible.
 - 4 of the 12 have to do with the nature of leprosy (**Leviticus 13 and 14**).
 - The underlying Hebrew words are unique in the Bible, and indicate pain, irritation, gnawing and decay.
 - 1 of the 12 describes Hanna’s agitation and discontentment (**1Samuel 1:6**)
 - Hebrew word: “ra’am” (raw-am; 07481)
 - 13 occurrences – “thunder”, “roar”, “trouble”
 - 4 of the 12 directly command against fretting (“fret not”), or use it negatively as describing the wicked under curses from God (**Psalms 37:1,7,8; Proverbs 24:19**)
 - Hebrew word: “charah” (khaw-raw; 02734)
 - 87 occurrences – “kindled”, “wroth”, “hot”, “angry”, “displease”, “incensed”, “burn”
 - Strong’s: “to heat oneself in vexation”
 - 1 of the 12 describes the foolish tendency of men to fret against God (**Proverbs 19:3**)
 - Hebrew word: “za’aph” (zaw-af; 02196)

- 5 occurrences – “wroth”, “sad”, “worse liking”
- Strong's: “to be out of humor; enraged, angry, perplexed, sad-looking”
- 1 of the 12 describes the rage of the wicked under the afflicting hand of God (**Isaiah 8:21**)
 - Hebrew word: “qatsaph” (kaw-tsaf; 07107)
 - 34 occurrences – “wroth”, “anger”
 - Strong's: “to put oneself in a rage”
- 1 that describes God being “fretted” (**Ezekiel 16:43**)
 - Hebrew word: “ragaz” (raw-gaz; 07264)
 - 41 occurrences- “tremble”, “move”, “rage”, “shake”, “disquiet”, “troubled”, “quake”, “afraid”

Summary:

- When we fret, there is a destructive storm thundering within us; our hearts are consumed and distracted. Our countenance often gives witness to that storm. Left to rage on, our fretting can be a gnawing pain within us that leads to damage and decay. Depending upon the focus of our fretting, it can be accompanied with sadness and grief; worry and fear; or burning anger. Not only can unchecked, faithless fretting bring us to ruin, it can be a deadly contagion that spreads to others.

Now that we have a working definition, we will consider the following questions:

1. What does it mean for God to fret?
2. What does it mean for men to fret?
3. What should we do when we find ourselves fretting?

What does it mean for God to fret?

Ezekiel 16:35-43 “35 Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD: 36 Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them; 37 Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness. 38 And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy. 39 And I will also give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places: they shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare. 40 They shall also bring up a company

against thee, and they shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. 41 And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou also shalt give no hire any more. 42 So will I make my fury toward thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be quiet, and will be no more angry. 43 Because thou hast not remembered the days of thy youth, **but hast fretted me in all these things;** behold, therefore I also will recompense thy way upon thine head, saith the Lord GOD: and thou shalt not commit this lewdness above all thine abominations.”

In short – when men “fret” God with their rebellion, his righteous anger becomes hot and focused, such that He roars into thunderous, purposeful action until He has satisfied His justice and righteousness. Simply put, when men fret God, He will justly recompense sorrow upon our heads, such that we have something to fret about! This thundering from God not only causes men to fret, but it shakes the very creation!

- **2Samuel 22:8** “Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of heaven **moved** and shook, because he was wroth.
- **Numbers 11:33** “And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was **kindled** against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague.”
- **1Samuel 7:10** “And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD **thundered** with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.
- **Job 9:2-8** “I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God? 3 If he will contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand. 4 He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered? 5 Which removeth the mountains, and they know not: which overturneth them in his anger. 6 Which **shaketh** the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. 7 Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the stars. 8 Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea.”
- **Joel 2:1-2** “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land **tremble**: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; 2 A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains ...”

What does it mean for men to fret?

Compared to the thundering of our justly offended God, the fretting of men is a tempest in a tiny little teapot. It is sorrowful and embarrassing to consider my own fretting, and

yet it is a continual struggle that we will grapple with for as long as we are in this corrupted flesh.

- **Proverbs 19:3** *“The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD.”*

Why do we fret?

- Discontentment / Envy
 - The Lord has constrained our path, and will not give us something that we desire.
 - Someone has a thing, or a circumstance that we want for ourselves.
 - Our life doesn't look the way we want it to.
 - **1Samuel 1:6** *“And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb.”*
 - **2Samuel 18:33** *And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!*
- Worry / Fear / Pain
 - We have an affliction of body, mind, or circumstance.
 - The wicked prosper around us.
 - The wicked persecute us because of our testimony for Christ.
 - Someone generally treats us unjustly.
 - We are generally worried about our lives, health, and daily needs.
 - We are worried about our loved ones (physically and spiritually).
- Anger
 - We can find ourselves angry because of some specific situation, or at some specific person who has offended us.
 - Our discontentment, envy, and worries can all easily shift into anger; anger at someone specific, or general anger, all of which is ultimately anger with the God that has appointed our path.
 - **Genesis 4:5** *“But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.”*

Righteous indignation

- Our spirit can certainly be worked up on the behalf of God and His righteousness. That is not necessarily fretting. Lot's righteous soul was vexed from day to day because of the wicked; we all feel that vexation continually and deeply.
- **2Kings 13:19** *“And the man of God [Elisha] was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.”*

- **Exodus 16:20** *“Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was **wroth** with them.”*
- We see the wickedness around us getting worse at a shocking rate, and we have every reason to believe that it will continue to devolve. As such, we have to take particular care that we don't let righteous indignation become either faithless fretting, or self-righteous raging. It is easy to slip from righteous indignation into self-righteousness. Our flesh, and our personal view of what is right, constantly tries to push to the forefront. God mercifully breaks that pride and brings us to a spirit of humility and meekness, whereby we are convinced that we have no good thing in us, and we trust upon God.

What should we do when we find ourselves fretting?

Practical thoughts:

- Call it what it is. Fretting is sinful, and is the opposite of trusting God.
- Prayer. This is not a trite answer. This is not a rote thing to do. It is a wonderful remedy that is available to us 24 hours a day. We should seek God with much thanksgiving. We should seek Him according to His names and His promises. We should seek Him without wrath for our circumstance, and without doubting His ability to deliver, or His purpose when He doesn't deliver immediately or in the way that we desire. We should seek Him for understanding and direction. We should seek Him for contentment with our lot. We should ask Him to break our pride, and to reset our spirit and our perspective to one of godliness and humility. We should NOT seek Him on our terms, or demanding our version of the appropriate outcome.
- Consider God's promises and deliverances. When we are fretting up a storm, we tend to be myopic - only focused on the immediate situation; no thought of the Lord's past deliverances, or His future promises - only our current distress. Bad thinking, which leads to bad speaking, and bad decisions. When we're in the midst of the storm, it's time to recount the mercies and promises of God!
 - **Psalms 4:4** *“Stand in **awe**, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.”*
- Consider that the Lord is working a good work by exercising you in the current matter.
- Change your perspective. Challenge your assumptions. Consider the eternal view.
- Force yourself to go through the exercise of putting a positive construction on everyone involved in the situation. If need be, go point by point through 1Corinthians 13, and challenge yourself to do what is commanded.
 - **1Corinthians 13:4-7** *“4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, 5 Doth not behave itself unseemly,*

seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; 6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; 7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”

- Put your shoulder to the plow. Stop stewing – start laboring.
- Engage with your co-elect. Disengaging, and taking counsel with ourselves can be the very path that leads us to fretting. Lots of imagined monsters in the shadows as you pull away from the body; lots of opportunity to create issues – to find fault. Lots of lost perspective. Lots of lost opportunity to provoke and be provoked. *“They that feared the Lord spake often one to another.” (Malachi 3:16)*
- Spend time purposefully considering your own blessings from God, and how to better utilize them. Look away from what others have.
- When your fretting involves being worried about someone else’s behavior or spiritual condition, call the fretting what it is. Separate the fretting, assumptions, anger, jealousy, etc. from any actual thing that needs to be done for the good of that person. From that perspective, you are in a proper position to go to them and address them in faith and charity – looking for their good, rather than to vent your spleen at them.
- Recognize that your fretting is only destructive – it accomplishes nothing. Therefore, quiet your spirit before God, and trust Him. Consider the words of Christ:
 - **Matthew 6:25-34** *“25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? 26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? 27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? 28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? 31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. 34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”*

Psalms 37:1-20 “1 **Fret not thyself** because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. 2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. 3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. 4 Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. 5 Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. 6 And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. 7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: **fret not thyself** because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. 8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: **fret not thyself** in any wise to do evil. 9 For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. 10 For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. 11 But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. 12 The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. 13 The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming. 14 The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. 15 Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken. 16 A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. 17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous. 18 The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be for ever. 19 They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. 20 But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.”

Hannah:

1Samuel 1:1-20 “1 ¶ Now there was a certain man of Ramathaimzophim, of mount Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephrathite: 2 And he had two wives; the name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other Peninnah: and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. 3 And this man went up out of his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice unto the LORD of hosts in Shiloh. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the LORD, were there. 4 And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions: 5 But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb. 6 And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her **fret**, because the LORD had shut up her womb. 7 And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the LORD, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat. 8 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? 9 ¶ 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. 10 And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the LORD, and wept sore. 11 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 no razor come upon his head. 12 And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli marked her mouth. 13 Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken. 14 And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. 15 And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. 16 Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto. 17 Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. 18 And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad. 19 ¶ And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the LORD, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the LORD remembered her. 20 Wherefore it came to pass, when the time was come about after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel, saying, Because I have asked him of the LORD."

- My friends, we are prone to see Hannah as a victim in this situation. My heart hurts for her distress every time I read this. We see the outcome, and the faithful words that she ultimately says; we see the fact that God blesses her, and so we lump that together with the initial situation, and paint this woman with a lily white brush. I love Hannah - but that is not the case. She is not a victim. We cannot color **ourselves** as victims. That is a part of the undoing of this world around us: everyone is a #victim for every reason they can dream up. Their victimhood IS their righteousness. God forbid! The reality: everyone is a perpetrator! Everyone has sinned against God. Spending our days yearning over something that we want – fretting and chafing against everyone around us - does not make us a victim, it makes us further sinners against the King!
- We aren't told much about Peninnah, but because of the tendency to see Hannah in a positive light, and the connotation of "provoked", we tend to see her as a villain – a playground bully. Maybe she was; maybe she spent her days finding ways to purposely pick at Hannah. But maybe not. How often do we find ourselves discontented, and make an adversary in our own mind, because someone else has the thing that we covet? We create a war that doesn't exist in reality – the other person doesn't even know it's happening! When we are in that state of discontentment, we are provoked by any and every action and word from our fabricated adversary. The very existence of Peninnah (and her children) provoked Hannah. My friends, when we find ourselves fretting in discontentment, we need

to purposefully look away from Peninnah. She is not the problem. We are the problem. Look to our real adversary – God! Bow before Him and ask Him to quell the storm inside of us, and give us contentment and peace with the lot that He has provided us. Ask Him to give us a right heart toward the person we are making war with, and then get our feet in motion to pursue real and lasting peace with that person.

- Notice the parallel between Hannah / Peninnah with Rachel / Leah.
 - The foundational problem in this divided household is Elkanah. He brought sorrow and distress upon everyone involved by marrying two women. Jacob did the same thing, and found himself with the same problem. Matthew Henry: *“thus are men often beaten with rods of their own making”*.
 - Leah and Peninnah found themselves blessed with many children, yet they didn’t have the true affection of their husband. Rachel and Hannah were barren, but they had the full affection of their husband. Neither could see their own blessings; they could only see the blessings of their adversary which they coveted. How often do we overlook the overwhelming blessings that God has given us, so that we can stew in discontentment about the thing we desire?
- God did not bless Hannah while she sat and fretted about her desire. He did not bless her while she was asking amiss, to consume upon her lust. (**James 4:3**) He blessed her when she turned her desire God-ward. She committed her way, her substance, and her desire - the very blessing she sought - to God.

“The Song of Hannah”

- Chapter 2 begins with what is often referred to as “the song of Hannah”. Her words are a wonderful profession of faith. They are the words of a soul that God has exercised; a soul that He has made fruitful through affliction and distress. Consider that this is the fruit that we want to blossom in our own hearts, and therefore let us not be fretful in the face of our afflictions, but let us see them as mercifully appointed by our Father to refine, purify, and prepare us.
- There are some elements of her prayer that could be read as directly taking a shot at Peninnah, as though she is grandstanding with a petty celebration of victory over her rival. That would make these words cheap, humanistic, and at odds with the rest of the scriptures. This is not about personal exaltation. On the contrary, her perspective has shifted from temporal things to eternal things.
- This is the outpouring of a soul that the Lord has exercised, and brought to a spiritual understanding of reality. The desperate depravity and folly of men; the absolute sovereignty of God; the only hope of salvation; culminating with a view of the Messiah and His kingdom to come. This is where our hearts need to go when

we begin to fret. Realistic view of ourselves and our God, and therefore put our thoughts toward him.

1Samuel 2:1-10 *“1 And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. 2 There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. 3 Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. 4 The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength. 5 They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble. 6 The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. 7 The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. 8 He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’S, and he hath set the world upon them. 9 He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. 10 The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.”*

I love you all. Amen.