

Nazarene Bible College Chapel

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Dr. Desmond Barrett; Ed.D.

Listening to the 'hmm'

1 Samuel 1:6-18

If you have listened to many sermons of Dr. Jim Diehl, former General Superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene over the years, you have probably heard his spiritual reminder: "If it matters to you, it matters to God." Then he usually pauses for dramatic effect and says, 'Hmm.' It is in the 'hmm' that the Lord began to speak to my heart in a new and challenging way. That simple but profound spiritual reminder has been written in every Bible that I have and etched in my mind and heart for over a decade.

When I entered Nazarene Bible College as a student, I was coming from a place of the 'hmm.' 'Hmm. Is this a good idea?' I had flunked out of community college a decade before, just out of high school, losing a full-ride scholarship. The scholarship was not based on academics but based on my level of family poverty. I was about to turn 30 years old and wondered if an 'older student' could accomplish the task that I previously failed to achieve. The 'hmm' represented haunting self-doubt, fear of failure, and longing deep within my soul to fulfill a lifelong dream of attaining a college education. I was coming from a family that did not have a college graduate. A family who did not have a Christian outside of my wife and me? I had no marker, no inspiration, no example to follow, but I did have a God who knew my heart and who was wooing me to serve Him in a deeper and more meaningful way. When I entered NBC, I joined with the 'hmm' reverberating deep within my spirit.

The 'hmm' has been heard throughout scripture. For most, it is likely to have been skipped over but occasionally caught by the one unable to speak, only able to utter a sound coming deep within them as the words from the Word spoke to their situation. We find one of those instances in

1 Samuel 1:6-18 (NIV):

⁶Because the LORD had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. **(hmm)** ⁷This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. **(hmm)** ⁸Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

⁹Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. **(hmm)** Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the LORD's house. ¹⁰In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. **(hmm)** ¹¹And she made a vow, saying, "LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head." **(hmm)**

¹²As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. **(she was racked by hmm)** Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴and said to her, “How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.”

¹⁵“Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. ¹⁶Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.” **(For the very first time audibly Hannah speaks her hmm for others to hear.)**

¹⁷Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

¹⁸She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. **(For once someone truly listened to her hmm.)**

Each term, students begin most classes by sharing their stories of their ‘hmm’ with other students and faculty as they post some form of their autobiography, highlighting their spiritual journey. For some students, it is a perfunctory assignment. They share their positive social media imaged story of their faith journey, seeking credit on one of their first assignments. But for the ‘hmm’s’ their testimony of God’s grace, healing, and calling leap from the page with a loud thunderous HMM!

Each of us connected to Nazarene Bible College as an administrator, faculty member, support personnel, student, or alumnus have an Eli opportunity to be a part of helping a student or even each other out of our hmm moment by listening to the hmm.

We (the NBC Family) are called to: Listen to each student

For Elkanah, he listened, but he projected his feelings when he said in verse 8, “Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don’t you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?” For Eli, he listened, but he too projected his feelings when he said in verse 13b – 14, “Eli thought she was drunk (14) and said to her, “How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine.” Reflect in your spirit and ask yourself today: Am I listening to what the student has written, or am I just acknowledging the task? NBC is a dedicated online institution of higher education. Who has a clear and distinct purpose, “to glorify Jesus Christ as Lord by preparing adults to evangelize, disciple, and minister to the world,” it is more important than ever to listen to the student’s words either in written or oral form. For Hannah, she needed someone desperately to acknowledge her pain, pray with her, and walk with her as she prepared for an unknown future with a known God. Your calling is more than your title or job description. It is to be Christ to those who cross your path in and out of the classroom. God is calling you to listen to each student.

We (the NBC Family) are called to: Learn from each student.

From the very beginning, when students walked onto the campus of Nazarene Bible College in Colorado Springs to entering her online portal today, NBC has been a flame of hope, honoring the call that the student had on their life. Elkanah and Eli could not experience what Hannah had and was enduring by not having a child. While the anguish was seen physically outside, these two men seemed incapable of attaining Hannah’s true nature of her pain.

But friends, you can learn from each student every day by striving to experience their true story by asking meaningful questions that let the student know they are valued, loved, and appreciated. While

Elkanah asked three pointed questions in verse 8, “Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don’t you eat? Why are you downhearted?” he finished the series of questions by turning the situation back to him. His feelings, and his desires, thus erasing any impact of his original three questions. Let this portion of scripture remind us all that in learning about the student or another person connected to the college, you glean from them that is important as it lays the foundation of what you will be able to build upon in the future.

We (the NBC Family) are called to: Lean into each student’s ‘hmm’.

Hannah carried into the temple years of baggage. Negative words of her rival. The shame of not being able to have a child. The pain of her husband not understanding her struggle. The sorrow that her God would not answer her request. Misunderstanding from those at the temple who saw her pray. Yet, she kept serving and kept being faithful. It was not until Eli leaned into Hannah that he saw for the first time the person she always was, a woman of faith. As Hannah poured out her 'hmm' to Eli in verse 17, "Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." He realized that she was a woman of God who had a story that he had been missing.

Each student has a story that needs to be leaned into to be understood, acknowledged, and made to feel valued as part of the broader discussion in the NBC family. As an institution, NBC will continue to have an expanded opportunity to educate pastors, counselors, and Christian leaders. If each of you connected to her will do your part by leaning into each student's story and supporting them as they move from starting to completing a degree or certificate program through the online portal, which will, in return, increase the school's retention rate. Like Hannah, before struggling in her 'hmm,' students will face obstacles where they will need support and encouragement as they lean into you for help. As Eli said, "...may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

I cannot help but look back on my 'hmm' beginning and realize that when I was born to a prostitute mother and drug dealer father (who happened to use the alias Desmond Barrett as his street name in selling drugs), that God would use Nazarene Bible College, her administration, faculty, and her Christian values to redeem the name given to me out of spite, to God's glory. Within a decade of entering as a student, I would not only achieve my hidden dream of being the first in my family to graduate from college, but I would go on to earn a doctor of education and serve in the Church of the Nazarene as a pastor.

Friends, what you do matters. If it matters to God (as each student does), it should matter to you. Listen to each student. Learn from each student. Lean into each student's 'hmm.' You might change a life. More than that, you will impact the kingdom for generations.

Dr. Desmond Barrett, Pastor of Summit Church of the Nazarene in Ashland, KY.