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CY 4564: Culture and Emerging Generations

“Hello, Are You There?”

*Hello from the other side  
I must have called a thousand times  
To tell you I'm sorry for everything that I've done  
But when I call you never seem to be home  
Hello from the outside...  
--Adele, “Hello”<sup>1</sup>*

The haunting lyrics to Adele’s recent song “Hello” introduce the listener to a person who is seeking guidance, healing, forgiveness, and hope. It is unclear to whom the lyrics are being sung. This song could be to a former lover, or another person. Or, it could be a song for the self. Adele herself has hinted that this ballad is an inner monologue, where she is in search of knowing herself as an adult and discovering who she truly is.<sup>2</sup> But, no matter the interpretation of the song, it is clear that the singer is seeking discovery and wholeness, and she does this by crying out to someone or something.

There are many people in Scripture whose stories include crying out as they seek to know and discover who they are and what is their place in this world. Hannah, whose story is told in 1 Samuel chapters one and two, is one such character. Before the birth of her son Samuel, Hannah lived in sorrow because she was barren and couldn’t produce children for her husband, Elkanah. Although Elkanah looked upon Hannah favorably (on some days, even more favorably than his

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<sup>1</sup> “Hello” Lyrics.” ADELE LYRICS. 2015. Accessed November 28, 2015. <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/adele/hello.html>.

<sup>2</sup> O’Keeffe, Kevin. “In Spite of the Lyrics, Adele’s New Song Actually Isn’t About an Ex-Boyfriend.” Music.Mic. October 23, 2015. Accessed November 29, 2015. <http://mic.com/articles/127285/meaning-of-adeles-hello#.uUNVb2lsp>.

other wife, Peninnah), she still “wept and would not eat” because her rivals provoked her for not having any children of her own. (1 Samuel 1:6-7, NRSV)

The climax of the story happens when Hannah, who travelled with her family to Shiloh for their yearly worship and sacrifice, prayed in the temple. Hannah cried out to God, asking for favor and for a male child, who she would dedicate to the temple upon his birth. Upon first seeing Hannah pray, Eli, a priest, approached her and accused her of being drunk. When questioned by Eli, Hannah responds by saying,

“No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time.” (1 Samuel 1:15-16, NRSV)

Perhaps the words in the chorus of Adele’s “Hello” are words similar to those that Hannah prayed while she was in the temple. Perhaps, through her prayer, Hannah was seeking to find wholeness and to figure out her place in the world where she faced much anxiety and pain. In many ways, Hannah was seeking guidance, hope, and favor from God. She was seeking hope and joy in the midst of pain and brokenness. Perhaps Hannah was praying to find God’s grace and love in the midst of discerning who she is in her family and in society.

In our ministry contexts, we work with young people who are searching for their identity and purpose in the world. We work with young people who are discerning where God’s grace and love are active in their lives. We work with young people who, like Hannah, face the anxiety and pain that comes from outside pressures, people, and experiences. We work with young people who may be crying out to find meaning and purpose in the midst of a chaotic life. And, as leaders who work with these young people, we are invited to walk alongside them, provide them with a place to cry, and invite them into the journey of discerning where God is moving in their lives.

The key difference that we should note between the singer in “Hello” and Hannah is that instead of turning inward while searching for wholeness and meaning, Hannah turns to the transcendent, to God. Hannah prays to God for something that would make her feel whole again—a son. As mentioned previously, Adele herself has hinted that her song is an inner monologue, in which she cries out to herself while searching for meaning and purpose. We don’t know if our singer finds what she is looking for by the end of the song; the lyrics don’t say. However, we do know how Hannah’s story ends. We know that after praying and talking with Eli, Hannah was no longer sad (1 Samuel 1:18). We also know that God heard Hannah’s cries, remembered her, and blessed her with a son, Samuel.

Hannah’s song of lament turns into a song of joy after the birth of Samuel. In 1 Samuel 2, she prays a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to God. She prays:

“My heart exults in the LORD;  
my strength is exalted in my God.  
My mouth derides my enemies,  
because I rejoice in my victory.” (1 Samuel 2:1)

In Hannah’s story, what was a cry of lament became a cry of joy. We can’t definitively say the same about the singer of “Hello,” although we can hope that her inward cries help her find some peace. And we can hope and pray that our young peoples’ cries for meaning and purpose can be made to God. We can also hope and pray that we can walk alongside our young people as they travel this journey.