

NEW SERIES: MELTDOWN- *How God Most-High meets us in our Lows* *series graphic

We desire that everyone would know that God will often meet us at rock bottom, in our lowest moments of pain, or even of shame and guilt! Our God draws near.
(Being that it is mental health awareness month, we thought this might pair well)

Meltdown- *severe emotional distress due to an overwhelming situation*

IOW- A very stressful reaction to a very bad situation

Anyone ever experienced that, or know someone who has?

I live with 5 women: My wife, my 3 daughters and even the dog is a girl- I've seen my share of meltdowns!
(If you've never seen one just come over at my kid's bedtime)

I've had some meltdowns myself-

- some have been BIG, life-altering
 - like when arguing with my wife about my alcohol consumption I yelled out for the first time ever "I'M NOT OK!"- started my mental health journey
- Others have been a more MUNDANE, more embarrassing than harmful
 - Like when I was left with my firstborn and she cried for over an hour, until I finally yelled at the top of my lungs "SHUT-UP!", only to realize I wasn't home alone- a young man from our church was staying with us and heard it all

Maybe you've experienced some yourself:

- Nervous breakdown;
- an unexpected breakup that crushes you;
- shocking medical test results that alter the course of your life,
- flunking an exam, for the 10th time

Perhaps it's nothing big, not one single event at least. Rather it's death by a thousand cuts-

- The daily arguments; the sustained abuse; the ongoing neglect...

Whatever it may be, chances are, at some point we have all felt DISTRESSED

TITLE: *Discovering God through Deep Distress* *title graphic

Distress= extreme anxiety, sorrow, or pain.

Perhaps the person in my life that I've known to have endured the deepest distress was my own mother-

She was diagnosed with an aggressive type of cancer;

I recall her explaining to me a procedure they were going to do, how painful and intrusive it sounded,

I was afraid for her; I was in disbelief; I distanced myself so that I would not have to bear with her pain.

And for the first 2 years of her battle against cancer not only was she having to deal with the most physically traumatic thing a person could go through, but her children were also cold and distant.

(that's not even mentioning the financial burden,

or the fact that her best friend suddenly passed away in the midst of it all)

But listen to me, it was IN that distress, that God met her in such a way I can only dream to experience in this life. She knew God already; but she got to live the words of

Job 42:5 *I had heard reports about you, but now my eyes have seen you.*

When you find yourself in distress, you have 2 directions you can go:

- **Distance yourself from God**
- **Discover God for yourself**

The historical narrative we will be looking at today is a story of a woman, a mother, who underwent tremendous distress and discovered the God who met her there, in the low, in the distress.

Her name is **HAGAR** (not to be confused with Sammy Hagar who can't drive 55)

Turn to **Genesis 16** (page ____ in the butterscotch colored bibles)

As we dive into this story, keep in mind we are entering into a different context; about 4,000 years removed **Genesis 16:1-3** Abram's wife, Sarai, had not borne any children for him, but she owned an Egyptian slave named Hagar. ²Sarai said to Abram, "Since the Lord has prevented me from bearing children, go to my slave; perhaps through her I can build a family." And Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³So Abram's wife, Sarai, took Hagar, her Egyptian slave, and gave her to her husband, Abram, as a wife for him. This happened after Abram had lived in the land of Canaan ten years.

It's important to note that the slavery we find in scripture is not the same type of pre-civil war slavery we might think of. "Servant" may help us better understand Hagar's position.

Nonetheless, it is still not ideal. Hagar was likely one among many slaves Pharaoh gave to Abram & Sarai back in **Genesis 12:16** it's likely **all she has ever known is being a slave**

As far as we can tell, she gets no say in this matter

Genesis 16:4-5 He slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When she saw that she was pregnant, her mistress became contemptible to her. ⁵Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for my suffering! I put my slave in your arms, and when she saw that she was pregnant, I became contemptible to her. May the Lord judge between me and you."

Sarai had taken Hagar from being a slave, to being a wife (concubine); not only that, she was now carrying a child for Abram. She starts to look down on Sarai. It's a messy situation.

Hagar is not completely faultless in this, nor is anyone else in scripture; real life, real people. *Only Jesus!*

Genesis 16:6 Abram replied to Sarai, "Here, your slave is in your power; do whatever you want with her." Then Sarai mistreated her so much that she ran away from her.

Abram essentially strips her of her "wife" role and gives her back to Sarai as a slave; Hagar has no voice

'Mistreated' - lit. humbled her down (though likely in an aggressive manner)

Genesis 16:7 The angel of the Lord found her by a spring in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.

Where was she going?

on the way to Shur = the direction of Egypt (about 300 miles from Canaan to Egypt)

How well do you think the trip would have gone for a pregnant woman, by herself, with no provisions?

God found her; He saw her when no one else did (spring= lit. eye')

Genesis 16:8 He said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?"

She replied, "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai."

Up to this point in the narrative, no one has talked *TO* Hagar; just *about* her.

She's been more a pawn than a person.

We didn't even know her name until God said it

'Where have you come from & where are you going?'

God doesn't ask because he needs to know—He needs her to reflect-

In essence- ***your solution to your distress is going to make a bigger mess***

Genesis 16:9 The angel of the Lord said to her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her authority."

Can we agree that what God is asking her to do, is a difficult?

DICLAIMER: Descriptive VS Prescriptive text (this is descriptive)

If you are in an abusive situation that places your life in danger, please don't think God will shun you if you get yourself to safety.

Two things are going on here:

- God is redirecting her away from a perilous journey ahead that may likely kill her and her unborn child, sparing her the suffering that lies ahead
- Secondly, and this one is difficult, God is directing her back into a situation of suffering and despire.

Let me put it this way:

Our suffering is never God's fault, but sometimes God uses it as part of his plan

And that is NOT dependent on whether you realize that truth or not;

it is not contingent on whether you will EVER realize that truth.

Sometimes God just cuts us because we need the surgery

He's not asking her to do what he would not. His own son, Jesus, marched toward suffering.

Genesis 16:10-12 ¹⁰The angel of the Lord said to her, "I will greatly multiply your offspring, and they will be too many to count." ¹¹The angel of the Lord said to her, "You have conceived and will have a son. You will name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard your cry of affliction. ¹²This man will be like a wild donkey. His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand will be against him; he will settle near all his relatives."

Let me make a point to those of us who are more familiar with our bibles:

Ishmael may not have been the son of *THE* promise,
but he would be the son of the promise made to her.

Though no one else gave her a voice, God heard her cry. In her distress, **when she felt unheard, God listened.**

Even when we feel unheard in our distress, God listens

Ishmael= God hears

Think about it- God asked her to go back into her situation... BUT now everyone has to hear all day long as they raise this little boy "GOD HEARS"

Sarai has to hear, Hagar has to hear, Abram has to hear it- and they have to say it

Please have no doubt that they all believed her because look what happens when she goes back

Genesis 16:15-16 So Hagar gave birth to Abram's son, and Abram named his son (whom Hagar bore) Ishmael. ¹⁶Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.

Abram was the patriarch; he chose the name he wanted. They knew God heard her.

And just in case you're wondering if "the angel of the Lord" mentioned over and over again is God or not, keep in mind that Angel=Messenger; Jesus is God's message & messenger (John 1 He is the Word)

But even more so, look at what Hagar herself has to say-

Genesis 16:13 So she named the Lord who spoke to her: "You are El-roi," for she said, "In this place, have I actually seen the one who sees me?" El-Roi= God sees me

Q: Have you seen the God who sees you?

God met Hagar by a spring (Lit. eye)

Thousands of years later, John 4- another woman, another outsider, a Samaritan woman, was met by God at a well also, and he saw her, everything about her

John 4:29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did..."

Set your eyes on the one who sees, open your ear to the one who calls, lift your prayer to the one who hears

Eventually Abram would have another son, the one God promised him

Genesis 21:5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.
for 14 years Hagar had lived with the tension of Sarai eyes on her

Genesis 21:8-11 The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day Isaac was weaned. ⁹But Sarah saw the son mocking—the one Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham. ¹⁰So she said to Abraham, "Drive out this slave with her son, for the son of this slave will not be a coheir with my son Isaac!"

¹¹This was very distressing to Abraham because of his son. (no mentioned concern for Hagar)

Hagar was, as far as we can tell, unloved at best, despised at worst

Genesis 21:12-13 But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed about the boy and about your slave. Whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her, because your offspring will be traced through Isaac, ¹³and I will also make a nation of the slave's son because he is your offspring."

God had made a promise to Hagar regarding her son, but he was also about to liberate her

Genesis 21:14-16 Early in the morning Abraham got up, took bread and a waterskin, put them on Hagar's shoulders, and sent her and the boy away. (not even a horse or a donkey?) She left and wandered in the Wilderness of Beer-sheba. ¹⁵When the water in the skin was gone, she left the boy under one of the bushes ¹⁶and went and sat at a distance, about a bowshot away, for she said, "I can't bear to watch the boy die!" While she sat at a distance, she wept loudly.

Hagar is again in distress; once again helpless- similar to Abraham, she had received a promise, but the hope of that promise was now 50 yards away dying of dehydration

Genesis 21:17-20 God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, God sees. God hears. Heaven is attentive to our suffering.

"What's wrong, Hagar? Don't be afraid, for God has heard the boy crying from the place where he is.

Q: What place of distress are you in? Can I remind you that God not only hears, but is actively listening.

¹⁸Get up, help the boy up, and grasp his hand, for I will make him a great nation."

¹⁹Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well. So she went and filled the waterskin and gave the boy a drink.

Abraham had given Hagar a bottle, God gave her a well.

²⁰God was with the boy, and he grew; he settled in the wilderness and became an archer.

God meets us in our lowest moments of distress.

He doesn't just see and hear as a *spectator*- He provides and often, more often than we realize, He intercedes.

Hagar experienced extreme sorrow, utter desolateness, broken heart;
but it was through her anguish that she discovered God for herself.

Through her distress she discovered God's comfort;
Through her loneliness she discovered God's nearness;
Through her abuse she discovered God's care.

It was in this room about 10 years ago, I was dating Meli at the time, attending I.B.D.E.A.,
the pastor had a sermon for just for the moms, everyone sat with their mothers, I told Meli to go sit with hers;
I sat on the side. I cried the entire service, really cried, sobbed; tried to hold it in but it was obvious...
and yet, no one saw me that day. No one approached me, no one heard me.

During that whole service I replayed the days when my mother was sick, and I thought about
How I cried out relentlessly for God to heal her, **yet he did nothing.**
How I bargained that he should spare her and take me, **yet he did nothing.**
How I waited for him to intervene, **yet he did nothing!**

Many have said in different ways this same truth:

**We must not try to understand God through the lenses of our circumstances,
but rather through the lenses of the cross.**

I remembered that day 10 years ago, that as I suffered the loss of someone I loved dearly,
that God not only knew my pain, but that through it, I could know him better

Look at His son, Jesus- Ishamel's thirst was quenched, but Jesus' died thirsty;
Ishamel's life was spared, but Jesus' life was not;
Hagar was seen and heard, but Jesus was forsaken;
Hagar was comforted, but Jesus was killed.

**Do not allow your distress to deter you or distract you from seeing God as he really is-
Allow your distress to help you discover the grace of God**

Grace- Grk 'charis'; carries the idea of **leaning** towards, **extending** towards, **inclined** towards.
both the Greek and its Hebrew (lang.s of the bible) equivalent carry the same idea

To say that in your distress you can discover the grace of God, is to say that
In your distress you can discover that God extends himself to you

If you drop everything and run towards your child when they cry (or towards your dog),
how much more don't you think God moves towards you in your distress?

MAIN TAKEAWAY- Our distress is the meeting place for God's grace

It's in our distress where we discover firsthand, God really, truly cares

There is no low, low enough that God won't gladly and urgently meet us there

*****CALL UP WORSHIP TEAM**

INVITATION- Gospel presentation- God has provided to rescue us from the deepest distress- sin and hell

It is said that Mother's Day is the day with the lowest crime rate of the entire year!... which just goes to show how much crime mothers are out there committing the rest of the year when they're not at church or brunch with their kids!

In all seriousness, we want to **honor** and **celebrate**:

- Mothers
- Mothers to be

Isaiah 66:13 As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you;
and you will be comforted over Jerusalem.

We also want to **acknowledge**:

- Mothers of children who've passed
- Mother's who've suffered miscarriages
- Those women who haven't been able to conceive
- Those who have had abortions that at the time thought was the best choice

And also:

- those who've lost their mothers
- those who've grown up without them

Prayer & Blessing

BULPEN-

Job; Nebu; Elijah; Peter; Hagar; Hezekiah (2 Kings 18 &19); David (when acting crazy); Noemi; Hanna
Jehoshaphat