

Frano Salek's story of misery:

- 1962 Frano Salek was travelling by train from Sarajevo (in the then Yugoslavia) to Dubrovnik in jumped the tracks and careened into an icy river drowning 17 fellow passengers he received a broken arm and hypothermia.
- A year later on his first and only airplane flight the plane he was traveling in went down killing 19 incredibly he was sucked out of the plane out of a malfunctioning door and landed unharmed in a haystack.
- later he was on a bus that skidded off the road into another icy river. His misfortune did not end with train, plane and buses. two of his cars caught fire one time burning off his hair. He was hit by a bus and in 1996 swerving to avoid an oncoming truck he barreled off the road leaping free at the last second from his car as it plunged 300 feet off a cliff.
- The only truly lucky thing that happened to him was winning \$1,000,000 when he bought his first ever lottery ticket in 2005 but wait for it to celebrate his fifth marriage.

Misery was not far from him. I wonder how many of us feel the same way...frequent bouts of suffering, a litany of pain, seasons of despair, a catalogue of suffering.

Misery presents a real problem for people of faith.

The ubiquitous presence of pain and suffering - unwanted, apparently undeserved, and not amenable to explanation - poses an enormous obstacle to unflinching trust in the infinite goodness of God. Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust*

Today we will take on the topic of faith in the midst of misery by looking back at someone in our spiritual family tree. One of the most miserable people in the story of God. **Hagar**

Genesis 16 page _____

16 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; ² so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having

children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.” Abram agreed to what Sarai said.³ So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife.⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.

⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me.”⁶ “Your slave is in your hands,” Abram said. “Do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai mistreated Hagar (abase, defile, humiliate); so she fled (fugitive) from her.

Let’s chronicle her misery

- Hagar was a slave – maybe given to Sarai from Pharaoh
 - She was not with the Abrahams out of love or hire
- Hagar had to succumb to “non-consensual intimacy” (Raped)
 - This was socially acceptable in the ancient world but it was monstrous none the less
- Hagar had to face an unwanted pregnancy
 - Led to her despising Sarai – deeply emotional injury and scars
 - And it gets worse...

Sarai – narcissistic and controlling blames husband and threatens him. Abraham – the manipulated enabler – you can see him throw his hands in the air - “the slave is in your hands”

- Hagar is then abused (“mistreated”)...humiliated, defiled
- Hagar becomes a fugitive – escaped slave

Our introduction to Hagar is nothing but misery... but when we pick up the story something extremely unusual happens to her...

⁷ The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur.(on the way to Egypt) ⁸ And he said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” “I’m running away

from my mistress Sarai,” she answered.⁹ Then the angel of the Lord told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.”

¹⁰ The angel added, “I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.”¹¹ The angel of the Lord also said to her:

*“You are now pregnant
and you will give birth to a son.
You shall name him Ishmael,^[a]
for the Lord has heard of your misery.*

*¹² He will be a wild donkey of a man;
his hand will be against everyone
and everyone’s hand against him,
and he will live in hostility
toward^[b] all his brothers.”*

Now I’m not going to go right to and she lived happily ever after or that God shows up and makes all her misery go away...there is little to no resolution...or redemption...or reason

Those are the three things people of faith commonly hold out for when facing misery...

- This will be resolved...my misery will end.
- This will be redeemed...something good will come from it.
- There is a reason for all this...I’ll get an explanation.

None of these things happen for Hagar. As a matter of fact....the angel says go back and submit (same word as misery) and this unwanted child will be hated by everyone and he’ll hate everyone in return. (side note – Ishmael – some traditions say father of all Arabs and ancestor to the Prophet Muhammed)

Misery upon misery upon misery

But...there’s a twist in the story...

¹³ She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.” ¹⁴ That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered. ¹⁵ So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael

- Lahai Roi – the living one who sees me.
- Beer Lahai Roi is **“the well of him who lives and sees me”**

Sometimes in the storyline of God people we see members of our family tree who have very different outcomes than Hagar.

Some spiritual ancestors show us triumphant stories of courageous faith in misery that lead to massive redemption. (Esther)

Some spiritual ancestors show us patient faith through misery that waits for and finally understands a reason. Hang on and you’ll see the reason. (Mary)

Some spiritual ancestors show us a daring faith through misery that endures waiting for resolution (Job)

Not Hagar – no redemption, no resolution, no reason but...

Hagar in in the middle of her misery has an experience of the presence of God.

When your misery seems to have no resolution or reason or redemption, perhaps it is enough to know that God sees you.

A fleeting, incomplete glimpse of God - the obscure yet real, penetrating, and transforming experience of his incomparable glory - awakens a dormant trust. Something is afoot in the universe. Brennan Manning

Hagar says to God: You see me. I am not alone. I am not unloved. I am not unknown. You see me.

When your misery seems to have no resolution or reason or redemption, perhaps it is enough to know that God sees you.

I want to take a moment and process this further with you but there is an afterword to Hagar's story...her misery is not over...

- She returns to Sarah and Abraham – her abusers and gives birth to the wild donkey of a child (Ishmael)
- Chapter 21 – Sarah finally is able to conceive and have a baby – Isaac
- But apparently hatred never was resolved between her and her slave...

⁸ The child (Issac) grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. ⁹ But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, ¹⁰ and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

¹¹ The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. ¹² But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring^[b] will be reckoned. ¹³ I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

¹⁴ Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

- Nice Abraham! – gave her a couple of sandwiches and some Gatorade and send her off into the Desert!
- In short order Hagar and Ishmael begin to die of thirst

¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she^[c] began to sob.

¹⁷ God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸ Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make

him into a great nation.”¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.²⁰ God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer.²¹ While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

OK – so maybe a small portion of resolution but certainly not enough to make up for the avalanche of misery she experienced.

But note what transpires between Hagar and God

- God Heard the boy
- The angel said God has heard him crying

Story Party 1 – God has seen me. Part 2 – God has heard me.

When your misery seems to have no resolution or reason or redemption, perhaps it is enough to know that God sees you and hears you.

For 42 years I sat with people at their most miserable.

- No resolution on the horizon
- No reason forthcoming
- No redemption – no heroic story at the end of all the suffering.

And I rarely tried to force any of those things on them – I tried simply to remind them that they were seen and heard by God.

- I tried to pull up the shade to allow the glory of God to peek into their darkness.
 - And that seemed to be enough
- I tried to picture a God who was in rapt attention to them in their crying.
 - And that seemed to be enough.
- I tried to describe to them a God who was present and near...beside them around them behind them.
 - And that seemed to be enough to allow them to carry on.

Perhaps that will be good enough for you today?

For those of you experiencing misery that goes on and on and on and on...

You may not experience resolution. You know that don't you?

You may not see some kind of redemption come out of it. You know that too, I'm sure.

And you may never get a reason for the misery...something that makes sense of it all.

Would it help to know that God sees you and he hears your cries?

Let's try something...close your eyes and allow yourself to sit in your misery for a moment.

- Ask God – Do you see me? Do you hear me?
- Wait for his reply to you right now.
- Sense his presence
 - What do you feel?
 - Is he saying something to you?