

# Recover

DEVOTIONAL



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# Introduction

***“Each heart knows its own bitterness,  
and no one else can share its joy”***

*Proverbs 14:10*

It's biblical. No one can completely know what you're feeling right now. The complexities of your situation, your history, your temperament, your emotions, your faith, your significant other... They are all too much for any other person to understand.

But there is hope. First, you have a God who does know. He knows both because he knows all things in his divine power, and because he has suffered as a human being. And while his situation is also different from yours, the Bible tells us that *“he is able to empathize with us”* (Hebrews 4:15). Hopefully you have felt some of that empathy already through your prayers through the Psalms. You will see more of Jesus' empathy in these devotions.

But we also want to take you to some others who, although they don't know you, have gone through things that are at least similar to what you're going through. They're your brothers and sisters in faith, believers who have gone before you, who have tasted the bitterness of sin and have had to struggle through it with God's help.

So, here we have included 14 short devotions, one for morning and evening every day for one week, to see that you are not alone and that God has helped people just like you in the past. We pray that through meditating on the experiences of these fellow Christians, you will find a community in the believers who have gone before you, and that you will grow in your trust that Jesus will help you like he helped them.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

## DAY ONE

3... Joseph

4... Hosea

## DAY TWO

7... Sarah

8... Jacob & Leah

## DAY THREE

11... Tamar

12... Bathsheba

## DAY FOUR

14... Tamar

15... Jesus Empathizes

## DAY FIVE

16... Samaritan Woman

17... Jesus & the Brokenhearted

## DAY SIX

18... Jesus & Saul

18... Jesus & Judas

## DAY SEVEN

19... Job

20... Epilogue

DAY ONE  
Joseph

**Genesis 39**

**JOSEPH DID NOTHING WRONG.**

Admittedly, Joseph caused his share of problems when he bragged to his family in Genesis chapter 37. Surely he was sinful from birth. But in Genesis chapter 39, when Joseph was a slave in Egypt, when he impressed his master Potiphar so much that everything was entrusted to Joseph's care, when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him day after day, when he acted with integrity and innocence just as a child of God ought to, when Potiphar's wife lied about him and got him arrested... Joseph did nothing wrong. Nevertheless, "*Joseph's master took him and put him in prison*" (Genesis 39:20). How could that happen? Maybe you know the feeling. You're not completely sinless, but in this situation you did nothing to deserve this. Yet you're the one suffering. How did this happen?

**POTIPHAR'S WIFE DID SOMETHING WRONG.**

Potiphar's wife let her emotion or her hormones or her boredom get the best of her, and God did not like it. God did not approve of how she dishonored her marriage commitment. God was heartbroken when she endangered Joseph's innocence. God disapproved of her sexual sin and her lies and all the consequences that came with it. It was bad when Potiphar's wife wedged sin in between her and her husband. It was wicked when she brought uncertainty and chaos into their home. It was her sin that cost Potiphar his best employee and his trusted friend. And Joseph called her out. "*How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?*" (Genesis 39:9). Joseph pointed out the real wreckage that came from her sexual sin: What was God thinking?

Maybe you know the feeling. Someone close to you did something bad and it's pointless to sugarcoat it. Sexual sin wrecks beautiful things and hurts innocent people. Why would God allow such wickedness?

**GOD USES BAD THINGS TO ACCOMPLISH GOOD THINGS.**

If you know Joseph's story, you know God can turn wickedness upside-down. Joseph was a victim of human trafficking, and he was trafficked to the only place in the region that had food. Joseph was unjustly thrown in prison, where he met some of the most powerful people in the kingdom. Joseph was forgotten by his trusted friends, so that he could come to power just in time to save his family.

God has a proven track record of outsmarting wicked people. God uses things which are objectively and undeniably wicked to accomplish good ends. Perhaps the most wicked thing in the history of the world was the crucifixion of the Son of

God on Calvary, and the end result was the forgiveness of every sin in the history of the world. Joseph's story was a small example of that. Your story is too.

### **JOSEPH DIDN'T SEE THE GOOD.**

Through the middle of Joseph's story, he never grabs a microphone and proclaims that he is ok, and "it's all good," and he can see what God is doing. He did not see what God was doing. When he was sold into slavery, he didn't know where he was going. When he was thrown in prison, he didn't know if he'd get out. When he was sexually assaulted, he didn't know if it would ever get better. Only at the very end of his story did Joseph say, "*You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good*" (Genesis 50:20.) Until the very end, Joseph didn't see what God was up to, and maybe you don't see it either.

### **GOD WAS WITH JOSEPH.**

Joseph did not need to understand God's plan. He needed to mourn. So he did, and God mourned with him. He needed to be still, and God sat in the stillness with him. He needed to work hard from the place where he was to love the people around him and honor God with the best of his abilities. And whether Joseph could sense it or not, God walked with him every step of the way. "*But while Joseph was there in the prison, the Lord was with him,*" (Genesis 39:20-21).

As you weep and as you work, God is with you. In fact, just like he was with Joseph, God is especially close to you. "*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted*" (Psalm 34:18).

## Hosea

***"When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, 'Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD.' So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim..."***

*Hosea 1:2*

Hosea was God's man, God's prophet, set aside to do God's work. One of the things God had Hosea do was marry Gomer. Of course, the challenge was that Gomer was a prostitute. God had commanded Hosea to marry someone who had not been, and in all likelihood would never be, faithful.

Hosea was God's object lesson. Israel had rejected God and turned to idols the way Gomer rejected Hosea and turned to other men. The result of the idolatry for the relationship between God and Israel was illustrated by the Hebrew names of Gomer's children which translate to "No Faithfulness," "No Love,"

and “No Relationship.” With the object lesson of Hosea’s marriage, God said to Israel: “You want to know what your idolatry means? You want to know what it’s like? Idolatry is adultery. They’re the same. Your idolatry takes what’s mine and gives it away. You belonged to me. I married you. And you ran off with other gods. You threw away the relationship with me that I gave you. Israel, you have been unfaithful.”

And what did Israel deserve for their idolatry? What did Gomer deserve for her adultery? By law, Hosea had the right to a quick divorce. In today’s terms, he’d get the house, the car, and the kids. But Hosea had the right to more than that. He could have Gomer killed. Stoned to death. Brutally executed.

God had similar rights over Israel. God would have been totally justified in a quick divorce, a complete separation. God could leave them to their gods of wood and stone and see how long they lasted. But more than that, God had the right to punish. Idolatry is sin. Sin deserves death. Yes, that means physical death, but more than just that, it means eternal death: Death in hell.

Instead, God tells Hosea to take back his adulterous wife. Why?!? Why doesn’t God allow Hosea to treat Gomer the way she deserves? For those who have felt betrayal, this seems like almost a double betrayal! I was betrayed and then justice was betrayed after! But God does not allow himself to treat Israel the way they deserve. No divorce. No execution. No separation. No eternal punishment. The earthly consequences of Israel’s sins were coming, but God was never going to abandon them. God would still remain faithful. God would still love. God would still call them his own despite what they deserved. Is that not the perfect picture of mercy?

How did Hosea feel about being God’s walking object lesson? Hosea was God’s man, God’s prophet, set aside to do God’s work, to marry Gomer and be betrayed and feel with his human heart something like what God feels about his people and about all people. How did Hosea feel about being put through that? How do you feel about it? You are God’s person. You’re not a prophet like Hosea, but you are set aside from the world by faith in Jesus to do God’s work. Every time you take a look at life through the eyes of faith you are putting yourself in a position to feel with your human heart something like what God feels: the pain of knowing how people are separated from him by sin, the longing for all people to turn back to him, and the love that sent his Son to win them back. Faith forces you to see things the way God sees them. And it isn’t always pleasant. It is often heartbreaking. How do you feel? How did Hosea feel?

Hosea was God’s man, God’s prophet, set aside to do God’s work. One other thing God asked him to do was to write down his story. Hosea ends his book with this very personal thought: *“Who is wise? Let them realize these things. Who is discerning? Let them understand. The ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them but the rebellious stumble in them.”* (Hosea 14:9)

Hosea knew God was right, regardless of how he felt. By faith, he saw things from God’s perspective. He saw how right God is to detest what sin does to

people, and how right God is to treat us infinitely better than we deserve. Hosea got to be right, the way God is, in his own treatment of Gomer. I doubt that felt good. But it must have felt right.

The crazy thing was that this whole situation seems so unnecessary! Gomer's unfaithfulness to Hosea was to be the object lesson for Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord. But Hosea didn't need to marry Gomer to make that point. That point is made nearly everywhere else in the Old Testament. Idolatry equals adultery. By the time we get to Hosea, God has already said that several times, and in none of those cases did God require his prophet to marry an adulteress and suffer all the suffering that comes with being married to an unfaithful partner. Gomer didn't have to suffer through the public shame of being an adulteress. It all seems so unnecessary. What did Gomer think of God's command to Hosea that he find a "promiscuous woman" to marry as an object lesson for the entire nation? Did she laugh jadedly at the idea of a prostitute marrying a prophet? Did she bristle at the idea of making her shame so public or was she desensitized to that too? Was she open with Hosea about the fact that she had no intention of remaining faithful to him after their wedding? Was the whole thing a joke to her? Was any of it really necessary?

We can be tempted to think similarly when we are confronted by the wreckage that sexual sin leaves in its wake. We can become jaded or desensitized to the whole situation. We can be tempted to just throw our hands up and give up. But what if this story is in the Bible, at least in part, to speak to that impulse? How else was Gomer ever going to be loved? How else was she ever going to understand how much God loved her, unless by seeing Hosea love her and forgive her without any reason other than that God told him to. Because Hosea married Gomer, Gomer was loved. Not in a Hollywood, romantic, "Pretty Woman" kind of way. We don't know that Hosea and Gomer ever "fell in love." We know for a fact that Hosea was commanded to love Gomer. She was loved, not for money, but for God.

Maybe, in a human sense, throwing your hands up and giving up makes the most sense, but to God, it doesn't. That's because to God, all people are worth his time and his love. Satan comes to separate people from people and people from God, but God comes to reconcile.

So, what do we learn from Hosea and Gomer? A lot less about us, and a whole lot about Jesus. You might read Hosea and think, "I need to go back to that person who was unfaithful to me because Hosea went back to Gomer." Maybe, maybe not... Just like Hosea and Gomer, and God and Old Testament Israel, forgiveness does not mean there aren't consequences. But if that's your conclusion, you're missing the point. The point is that when any of us are unfaithful to God, he comes back to us. How else could we be loved?

DAY TWO  
Sarah

**Genesis 20:1-18**

**HOW DID I GET HERE?**

How did the person I trusted and loved most do this to me? How do I move forward? I feel confused, hurt, and disgusted all at the same time. How is the person who is supposed to be my protector allowing me to protect him? Will we ever get past this? I don't see what comes next for us.

Sarah was a wife. She was loved by her husband. She was his treasured and loved friend. He was a well-established man who took care of her needs. She had no reason to believe she could be betrayed so horribly by her husband. But she was. Abraham, Sarah's husband had decided to lie about their marriage and pawn her off to king Abimelech to save himself. God came to Abimelech in a dream and told him not to lay a hand on Sarah, because she was Abraham's wife. Only through God's miraculous intervention was Sarah saved from what was effectively a rape facilitated by her husband.

The Bible doesn't tell us how Sarah felt, but we can only imagine Sarah felt confused, hurt, and disgusted. Maybe you feel those words too. Maybe you feel enraged, scared, and humiliated. Take a second to recognize one or two emotion words for how this process has been for you.

**HOW DID WE GET HERE?**

It's difficult to go through the pain of finding out someone you love is addicted to pornography. Difficult is even an understatement. But you are not alone. The same God who was with Sarah and was watching over her is with you too. God promises you, *"For I am the LORD your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you"* (Isaiah 41:13).

Your deliverance probably won't be identical to Sarah's. However, that doesn't change the fact that God is with you in your pain. He was with you when you found out your loved one is watching pornography. He is watching you in your sleepless morning hours. He is holding your hand when the tears rush down your face. He whispers to you, "don't worry, my child, you are not alone. I am with you every step of the way." The fact that God is with us doesn't take away the pain, but it does change it. It gives the comfort of not facing this alone.

When Jesus was on trial, something similar happened to him. As he was about to not be saved from physical abuse like Sarah was, one of his closest friends, right in front of his eyes, said, *"I don't know him"* (Luke 22:54-62). Do you feel like you've been forgotten, tossed aside, or disowned? Jesus did too. He's with you.

How did I get here? How did the person I trusted and loved most do this to me? How do I move forward? I feel confused, hurt, and disgusted all at the same

time. How is the person who is supposed to be my protector allowing me to protect him? Will we ever get past this? I don't see what comes next for us. I don't know the answers to these questions for your situation. However, I do know you have someone with you through the hurt.

## Jacob & Leah

### *Genesis 29*

#### **WHO WAS LEAH?**

Jacob worked for Laban seven years to win the hand of Laban's daughter Rachel. Jacob had fallen in love with her. As soon as the seven years ended, Jacob demanded what he was promised. Laban threw a party. They had a feast. Jacob had a great time and then spent the evening with his bride. But when he woke up on the first morning of the life he had been dreaming of for the past seven years, "there was Leah!" Not Rachel. Leah. Rachel's sister.

Why was Leah there? Well, Laban said it was because they had a custom of waiting to find husbands for younger daughters until after the older ones were married. Seems like the kind of thing that could have been mentioned—you know—at any point in the previous seven years!

Yet, "there was Leah." But who was Leah? She's not the character most people focus on as they read this story because she's an enigma. She slept with her sister's fiance because her dad told her to. She entered a marriage with a man who didn't love her and who didn't seem to know it was her he was with. She stayed with him, not just the week, but the rest of her life. She gave him six sons and a daughter and her maidservant so he could have two more sons whom she counted as her own. She competed with her sister to produce offspring for the man who loved her sister more than her, buying and selling the right to sleep with him. What kind of person is that? Neither the deceiver nor the deceived. Neither the lover nor the beloved. She seems to have no identity of her own. She's the daughter of a swindler, the older sister of the beauty, the first wife of the victim of both her father's swindles and her sister's beauty, and the mother of most of her husband's children. But who is she? "There was Leah!" But what does that mean?

What's your identity? What kind of person are you? When somebody says, "That was so (your name here)!" what do they mean? Who is there? Who are you?

Is your identity wrapped up in whom you sleep with, or whom you love? Is there a difference? Maybe you are the one someone else loves. Maybe you are what you do or what you get other people to do. Are you what you spend your years

on that makes them seem like days? Maybe you're what you spend your days on that makes them seem like years? Are you someone's daughter? Someone's son? Someone's sister or brother? Someone's beauty? Someone's victim? Someone's baby mama, baby daddy, baby girl, baby boy, or just baby? Who are you? And how do you know?

"There was Leah." But did she, or anyone else in the story, see her as significant? One person certainly did. Jesus did. Leah was Jacob's first and less-loved wife. Because of that she was Judah's mom. Whether you look at Matthew 1 or Luke 3, that's where you'll find Leah. Not named, but there between Jacob and Judah. You and I know Leah's name because of Jesus.

Who are you? What's your identity? While Satan might prefer that you identify with anyone or anything other than Jesus, Jesus identifies you. There you are, in the heart of God. Why? Because of Jesus. For Jesus. In Jesus. Through Jesus. You're not his several-greats grandma. But you are his. No matter what else or who else you are, he bought you with his blood...which came from Leah.

### **JACOB LOVED HIMSELF**

Jacob was a man with an inner unrest, an inner void in his life. Where did that come from? You can make the case it came from his upbringing. The second born son after his super manly brother, Esau, and therefore also in second place for his father's love. He was desperate for affection and approval. So, when he lays eyes on literally the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. he starts thinking, "You know, Dad never loved me, but if I can have love from this woman, the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, (as it's said Gen. 29:21) if I can make love to her, then maybe that will quiet my feelings that I'm a worthless person. The Bible tells us when Jacob met Rachel, he kissed her and began to weep aloud. He doesn't just think she's pretty. You don't start crying because someone's just pretty. She's his savior at that point. Her beauty is his savior. He's lovesick.

So Jacob went to work for Laban. And Laban said, "You know, you shouldn't just be working here for me for free, so name your price." He saw Jacob was a skilled, valuable laborer, and he said, "What can I give you?" Jacob said, "I want your daughter." He's willing to work a complete seven years, because he's desperate—he needs to have her. He commits himself to this because Rachel's beauty is the seat of his self-esteem. Jacob worked seven years to marry Rachel, and we're told those seven years seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. Time flies when you're having fun. Time flies when you're worshiping your idols. Though the time flew by, Jacob was paying close attention to his watch. When those seven years were up, Jacob went to Laban and said, "Give me my wife." Actually, what he literally said was far more crass, maybe even a little too crass for this book, because Rachel no longer was a wife to him, she was an object of his desires.

When Jacob goes to meet his bride at the time of consummation in the privacy and darkness of their wedding tent, Rachel is replaced with Leah. Jacob doesn't

figure it out until the next day. And the obvious question there is, “Um, how? Shouldn’t he....shouldn’t he know? He should know, right?!?” Yes, he should, but Jacob is more in love with the idea of Rachel than he really is with Rachel. So Jacob thinks he has what he thinks he wants. When it comes to idols, you pursue them because they offer you your deepest hope, but they always leave you disappointed. There is a throne in our hearts that is built only for God himself, and when you try to fill that throne with a person, you end up disappointed. With your idols, you always think you have what you want. You always think you’re going to bed with Rachel, but you wake up the next morning with Leah, unfulfilled, and unhappy.

### **LEAH WANTED TO BE LOVED**

Of the quests for love in this story, Leah’s is the most understandable. She’s not loved by her husband – she never has been – and she’s thought so little of by her father. She’s left devastated as someone who’s experienced the misuse of God’s gifts of marriage and sex. It is clear and obvious to everyone that she is not enough for her husband. Can you relate with how she must have felt at this point? We can imagine what she’s feeling, because she tells us in what she names her sons. The Lord had mercy on her, and she knew that. She names her first son Rueben, which means “see-son.” The Lord has seen me, but will my husband? She knew the Lord had seen her and loved her, but it wasn’t enough for her. She was loved by God, but she wasn’t loved by her husband. She names her second son Simeon, which is similar to the word for hearing, and she expresses that she knows the Lord has heard her prayers, but she’s still just priority #2 to her husband. Her children are a means by which she is trying to earn her husband’s love. Though she knows she has the love of God, she falsely and foolishly tries to use her children to medicate the hurt of the void of her husband’s love. She tried to earn the love of her husband even though she had the only love that matters all along. But then something changed. Leah has a breakthrough, and she’s the only one who appears to grow as a person in this account. After years and years of getting her hopes up, being let down and hurt by her husband, Leah names her fourth son “Praise the Lord.” She finally gets it. She didn’t need a man to give her what only God himself could give her, the validation her restless heart had been searching for her entire life. Could she have come to that conclusion without all the emotional pain? Maybe, but God often destroys our idols in order to take his rightful place in our heart.

### **JACOB, LEAH, AND JESUS**

Are you more like Jacob or Leah? Do you tend to pursue people’s love in order to feel like someone, or do you sit back and wonder why the people who should love you mostly ignore you? Maybe more importantly, how do you get cured of your love sickness? You have to see the beauty of Jesus. Leah, the unwanted, rejected sister was chosen to bring forth Judah, who would carry on the family line of the promised Savior of the world. When the Lord saw Leah was not loved, he saw her need, moved in compassion, and showed grace for this woman.

He had mercy on her. Those who are weak, ugly, and rejected by this world are God's chosen. The gospel saves people who are not strong, who are not intelligent, who are not successful, who are not beautiful, but people who know and admit they are weak, ugly sinners. God takes Jacob, the unwanted son, and Leah, the unwanted wife, unites them to bring forth Judah, the one through whom the Savior Jesus is going to come. Jesus, who is prettier than Rachel voluntarily became weaker than Leah, so that we, who spiritually look worse than Leah, would become more gorgeous than Rachel to God. It doesn't matter how you feel about yourself. It doesn't matter how this world feels about you. Because of the ugliness of the cross, you look perfect to God.

## DAY THREE

# Tamar

### *Genesis 38*

The first woman listed in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is Tamar.

Judah's oldest son, Er, married Tamar. We know nothing else about Er except that he was wicked and so the LORD had him die. Judah commanded his second son, Onan, to marry his brother's widow. Onan was happy to sleep with Tamar, but not to produce offspring, so the LORD killed him, too. Then Judah thought better of giving his sons to Tamar, as if it were her fault, as if she had a choice in whom the LORD killed, as if she had a choice in whom she slept with. So Judah withheld his son, Shelah, from Tamar, saving her from what would probably have been another selfish bedmate, but dooming her to the life of a childless widow.

Later, she was brought before her father-in-law, because she was discovered to be pregnant. She was being accused of prostitution. Judah was ready to have her burned to death for committing adultery. But Tamar sent word to Judah, and a seal, a cord, and a staff. "These belong to the man who impregnated me. Do you recognize them?" He did...all too well.

After dooming Tamar to the life of a childless widow, and after burying his own wife, Judah had met a prostitute and slept with her and left his seal and cord and staff with her. Without recognizing her, Judah had impregnated his widowed daughter-in-law, Tamar.

Judah stayed her execution. "She is more righteous than I," he said, and he let her live, and she had twin boys, one of whom would be an ancestor of Jesus. So, Tamar gets included in the genealogy of Jesus by being more righteous than Judah. More righteous than a father who raised two sons so wicked that God

stepped in and killed them. More righteous than a husband who mourns his dead wife by sleeping with a prostitute. More righteous than the man who never gave her any choice in who to marry or sleep with so that she felt she had no choice but to trick him into sleeping with her to survive. Judah doesn't set the bar very high at all. How hard could it really be to be more righteous than Judah?

How hard could it really be to be more righteous than Tamar? Married to some wicked men? Maybe that's a mistake we can forgive. Used by her selfish husbands and victimized by her father-in-law's abuse of power? We can't call that Tamar's fault at all. But the solution to her situation was all hers, and that was to sell herself sexually to the father of her two dead husbands, wait to be accused of prostitution, and then provide proof that her judge was complicit with her in her sin. That's not righteous either, is it? Tamar hops over the low bar set by Judah, but the bar she sets isn't higher by much, if at all. How righteous do you have to be to get a place in Jesus' family?

We like stories like Tamar's because we like to think the bar of righteousness is that low. We like to imagine ourselves stepping right over it. We like to pretend that the bar is set by other people, by other sinners. We like to forget that it was set by God. That being "more righteous than Judah" didn't do Tamar any good, and imagining ourselves "more righteous than Tamar" doesn't do us any good. None of us are as righteous as God, which is to say that none of us is any righteous at all.

And that's how righteous you have to be to get a place in Jesus' family. The minimum righteousness is none. Because righteousness is what gets you in, just not yours or Tamar's or Judah's. Just Jesus' righteousness. Only Jesus' righteousness gets you into Jesus' family, and this is enough for us all.

We don't have as many choices in life as we like to think we do, and we aren't as good at making them as we like to think we are. Tamar's story isn't supposed to make us feel better about the choices we make compared to her choices. Tamar's story is supposed to remind us of the choices God makes by his grace. How God chooses to include us. In Jesus' story. In Jesus' family. Through Jesus' righteousness.

## Bathsheba

### *2 Saumuel 11-12*

#### **GOD MAKES GOOD COME FROM EVIL**

I'm thankful that God portrays his people, including David and Bathsheba, with stark honesty. No covering up sin here. There's loads of it on display all over

2 Samuel 11 and 12. It starts with David letting his eyes linger where he knew they shouldn't, on a woman bathing on the roof of her house. But it really didn't start there, because David should not have been looking at that roof in the first place. His laziness left him home from leading his army, as he should have been. Perhaps needless to say, idle hands don't usually end up doing righteous acts. The consequences of these and subsequent sins ran deep. A family was broken, a man was murdered, a boy was stillborn, and a man "after God's own heart" ran away from God, not to mention sexual sin and violence would plague David's family for generations.

But thankfully that is not the whole story. There are bright spots. 2 Samuel 12:13 tells us that the Lord forgave David, though painful consequences remained, including the death of the boy conceived in adultery. But then, near the end of this sorry saga, we read: Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him (2 Samuel 12:24).

God takes our worst moments, including pain, emotional or otherwise, that we have inflicted on others or they have inflicted on us, and still twists them into accomplishing something good. Will we always see the good? God doesn't promise that. We also can't intentionally sin more to get more grace (Romans 6:1-2). Nor can we promise an earthly happily ever after; your relationship may be damaged beyond repair. But let us take comfort that God is in the middle of this mess turning what Satan intended for harm into something God's using for good.

## **A WOMAN OF VALUE**

Women tend to have a greater desire than men do for a close relationship with someone who loves and values them. In 2 Samuel 11 and 12, we aren't told if this is the reason why Bathsheba committed adultery with King David. Was she willing? Did she outsource her value as a woman in exchange for the attention she desired from a man, maybe especially a man whom others looked up to? It is the desire of every person to be esteemed by someone we esteem. For many, that happens in our romantic relationships. But when we equate our worth and value with the presence or absence of a romantic relationship, it will let us down every time. But God never lets us down. God loves and values us because of what Jesus accomplished on our behalf. "*The Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love*" (Psalm 147:11). You may esteem a certain person quite highly and desire their attention and affection... But you have God's attention and affection. You will be able to break free of the slavery to find your value in the opinion of another as you find your value more and more in the opinion of THE Other.

It's devastating when someone's significant other—a spouse, fiancé, or boyfriend/girlfriend—turns their attention to pornography. Shock, betrayal, and bitterness result, and rightly so. God hates that sin as well. But then the question becomes, "What now?"

Forgiveness is an act of the will. It means giving up the right to get even and

handing it over to God. But forgiveness is not reconciliation. Reconciliation only happens after trust has been reestablished. This takes time. It often requires counseling, praying, taking measures to remove temptations, and being accountable to a third party. When we remember how much God has forgiven us, this softens our hearts toward the one we love who has sinned against us. What seems impossible to us, is possible with God's help. "[God] is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20).

## DAY FOUR

# Tamar

## 2 Samuel 13

*\*This devotion includes a scene of rape that is included in the Bible and may be troubling to some readers.*

### **NORMAL, YET ENTIRELY UNIQUE**

All we read from Tamar's perspective is in 2 Samuel 13:12. In response to her half-brother (Amnon) demanding she come to bed with him is her plea "No, don't rape me. That shouldn't be done in Israel. Don't do this godless act! Where could I go in my disgrace." It wasn't enough for Amnon whose intense lust turned to intense hatred after the rape. He sent Tamar away in shame and disgrace. This seems to often be the way a person reacts after committing a sexual sin. Lust becomes disgust. The last we hear is that Tamar put ashes on her head, tore her gown, put her hands on her head and "went away crying." What might she have been feeling during and after this? Probably a whole host of emotions flooding in. We can only guess it was a complex mix of shock, surprise, dismay, sadness, anger, guilt, shame and embarrassment maybe mixed with humiliation and others. From a psychological perspective, Tamar's response to this injustice and awful abuse was normal. As is said about trauma, her response was a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. But just because something is "normal" across many different people, that doesn't make it any less of a unique tragedy for each individual who goes through it.

How about you? Maybe you can relate to some or most of her emotions. Maybe you're feeling a variety of different painful emotions mixed with grief and lament from a betrayal of trust and confidence. I want you to know, your response is normal and appropriate given the extent of your pain and loss and hurt. And yet, while it's normal, each person will experience their emotions uniquely. Since that is the case, why not bring your emotions to God. God can

handle your honest emotions as you bring them to him in prayer and lament. God sees your pain, God hates your injustice and God is here to care and comfort you.

*“Come back O LORD, rescue me. Save me because of your mercy... I am worn out from my groaning. My eyes flood my bed every night. I soak my couch with tears. My eyes blur from grief... The LORD has heard the sound of my crying. The LORD has heard my plea for mercy. The LORD accepts my prayer.” (Psalm 6:4, 6-8) “The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18)*

## Jesus Empathizes

***“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are— yet he did not sin.”***

*Hebrews 4:15*

A wife, sharing her problems with her husband just to feel his empathy, is met by her “fix-it” husband with solutions to her problems. “I’m not asking you to fix it. I’m just asking you to listen,” she retorts. Of course, this is a stereotype. There are many times when both men and women need to just be heard, not to have their problems fixed. Whether you’re a man or a woman, the odds are you have just wanted to be empathized with during this season.

And Jesus gets it.

Most of the time, we focus on the “fixing” qualities of Jesus. He heals sick people, raises dead people, feeds thousands of hungry people, forgives sinful people...that sort of thing...

But here, the book of Hebrews notes Jesus isn’t just a fixer. He’s also an empathizer. He feels what you feel. And yes, he can fix it...but sometimes that’s not really what you want or need right now. You just need to be heard, to be seen, to be valued with time.

Jesus empathizes.

He never runs out of time for you, he never misunderstands, he can say, “I know what you’re going through,” and actually mean it! He’s not disconnected from your humanity. He knows what it’s like to have a mind that spins, a heart that breaks, a stomach turned in knots. He knows what it’s like to want justice. He

knows what it's like to wonder "What next?"

So, run to him and tell him everything. Whatever it is. He will empathize.

## DAY FIVE

# Samaritan Woman

## John 4

Nobody wanted her.

Why else would she walk to this well at this time of day, when nobody else was going to be there? She didn't want any more stares, any more insecurity, any more rejection.

If nobody wanted her, then she didn't want them.

But when she got to the well, she wasn't alone. She didn't know it, but his name was Jesus and he asked her for some water - but that's not really what he sought. He was seeking her. He wanted to give her some water that would quench the thirst inside of her - the thirst to be cared for, considered, and cherished. That's what he promised:

*Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

He promised a well that won't run dry. Can you believe it? She couldn't, not at first. But he proved himself to her, and he made his love for her inescapably clear.

You see, while Jesus was a stranger to her, she was not a stranger to him.

Jesus knew everything about her. He knew she had experienced the crumbling of a marriage five times - and still he wanted to offer her this gift of living water. Still he, a Jewish man, wanted to talk to her, a Samaritan woman. Still, no matter the reason she was alone that day at that well, he wanted her to know that he knew her and he had something for her that would be, truly, enough.

Enough, even, for her to share. That's how transformative the love of Jesus is. It took her from wanting to be alone to wanting to find everyone she knew. Can you believe it? She did, once she knew how Jesus loved her.

# Jesus & the Brokenhearted

## Luke 4:18-20

We live in a broken, fallen world. It doesn't take much time to see the brokenness all around us and within us. Global news highlights, war, cancer, sickness, death, sexual brokenness, etc. But there is something absolutely heart-wrenching and gut-punching to be on the receiving end of sin's deadly consequences in a very personal way. It could be on the receiving end of a divorce, childhood trauma at the hands of a parent/loved one or the effects of a spouse or partner struggling with sexual addiction or infidelity. It could even be betrayal at the hands of an institution like a church or an employer that you thought could be trusted, but in fact caused significant harm. These types of hurts have a specific name called "betrayal trauma."

The impact of betrayal trauma is complex and detrimental. In Luke 4:18, we see Jesus read aloud a passage and prophecy from Isaiah 61 and it goes like this, *"The Spirit of the Lord is with me... He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted."* (NKJV). How does Jesus help heal our brokenheartedness whether it's betrayal trauma or some other hurt or difficulty? Let's explore a handful of ways he may work to heal you.

First, remember you are a son/daughter of the King. Jesus, your King, sees and knows your pain. The king of the universe knows what it's like to be a human and live in this broken world of sin. Not only that but he has empathy and compassion for you just like he did when he cried seeing the pain and grief over Lazarus family and friends moments before he raised him from the dead (John 10:33-35), or the time Jesus cried in Luke 19:41 knowing the pain and trouble Jerusalem would soon endure 40 years later at the hands of the Romans.

Second, Jesus also personally knows what it's like to be abandoned by his inner circle of friends on the eve of the worst night of his life. Worse yet, he knows what it's like to trans-cosmically abandoned by God! On the cross he declared, "My God my God, why have you forsaken me?" We have a Savior who knows these painful emotions intimately and cares deeply about what you're going through.

Finally, Jesus often chooses to work through other humans and the body of Christ. Next time you get support, understanding, or empathy from your close friend, family member, or church member, pause and think of how Jesus is wearing the mask of that person to love you and be with you. Jesus is also working through the mask of your pastor to remind you of Jesus' love and compassion as well as through Christian counselors and other professionals. God loves you so much he sent his Son to pay for the world's sin and one day he will come again to make this broken, sinful world new and restored. Hold firmly to him and his promises. And don't forget, Jesus is working all around you to help you with the resources he places in and around your life.

## DAY SIX

# Jesus & Saul

## Acts 9

“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

These are the words Jesus spoke to a man named Saul, a man who, up until this point, had been actively persecuting, arresting, and killing Jesus’ followers. Isn’t it interesting, then, that Jesus asks the question the way he does? It’s not, “Why do you persecute my followers?” It’s, “Why do you persecute me?”

That’s how Jesus is, though. He is not some distant God whose only concern for his followers is whether or not they’ll bow down and worship him. He is not a ruler who uses his subjects to do his bidding. He is not a Lord who just takes or demands.

Jesus is the God who is one with those he loves. He will never leave them nor forsake them because that would be like forsaking himself. He will bind up their broken hearts because their hearts and his heart beat as one.

When Jesus asked Saul why he was persecuting him, he did so through a powerful beam of light because, at that point, he was no longer on earth. Jesus had ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of God the Father. And he still felt the pain of his persecuted followers.

Just as he does today, for you. It is personal to him, just as it is to you.

Jesus is the God who is one with those he loves, and fear not: you are one he loves.

# Jesus & Judas

***“The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you.’”***

*1 Corinthians 11:23*

Paul could have defined the night Jesus gave us the Lord’s Supper with many different markers: “The night before he died,” “At the Passover meal,” or “During his last week.” But instead, he chose “On the night he was betrayed.”

Tonight is likely not the night you were betrayed, but maybe it was less than a week ago, and I bet you can’t imagine saying, “This is my body, for you” to anyone right about now. Don’t worry, you don’t need to. Porn kills love and

intimacy. A lot of reconciliation and work needs to happen before intimacy can be reestablished between you and your partner...and frankly it might never be reestablished. But that's not the point of seeing Jesus in this moment.

Instead, focus on these facts:

First, Jesus was betrayed. And no less than by a kiss (Luke 22:48)! An act of intimacy that hid the deception in Judas' heart. Who knows all the thoughts Judas had for the three years he was with Jesus, but he at least gave the appearance of loving Jesus. He listened to him. He was with him. They had great memories together... and yet he still betrayed him.

That might be how you feel. One who you thought loved you (maybe even for years), one you trusted, one with whom you maybe even were physically intimate, deceived you and betrayed your trust. Jesus understands.

Second, Jesus is still willing to give himself to you. You might feel used right now. That's because you were deceived. You were robbed of the intimacy God desires between a husband and wife (even if you are not married yet). But Jesus knew exactly what he was doing...and what he's still doing. Even though he was betrayed, he let it happen. He was not tricked or deceived. He was willing to be betrayed so he could offer to you an intimacy that will never be betrayed. He will never stop offering you himself, his body, at the Lord's Supper, to renew his promise that he will be faithful to you.

## DAY SEVEN

# Job

## ***Job 1:1-22***

Job had been a faithful servant of God. He was "blameless and upright." He was blessed financially, relationally, and spiritually. But, out of nowhere, everything went wrong. Literally, every piece of his life was gone. His children. His servants. His livestock. Out of nowhere, Job had lost everything in his life.

Have you felt like Job? Do you feel absolutely blindsided by what you learned? Do you feel like falling to the ground in pain and mourning for your loss and not moving on?

It is immobilizing to hear the words come out of their mouth about pornography. It feels like the world has slowed down and decided to cave in on you. As soon as you hear the words leave their mouth, the questions come flooding in. This can't be happening. How did I miss it? Did I somehow cause this? Why did they do it? Or maybe for you, it was a deafening silence. You saw words coming from their mouth, but you couldn't hear anything. Maybe you

cried. Maybe you felt numb. But, in every situation, betrayal is present.

The deep, immovable hurt of having trusted them and being betrayed...

Job understood the feeling of betrayal. He was a man who “feared God and shunned evil.” Job didn’t know this, but God had even boasted of his faithfulness in front of the devil. So why would God have allowed for one of his faithful believers to go through such agony?

The true answer is; we don’t know. We know the devil approached God and thought Job would curse God if his blessings were taken away from him, and God allowed it. We don’t know why God didn’t just send the devil away without an answer. That knowledge was not revealed to us.

We also are not given the answers on why God allows specific sufferings in our lives. We don’t get the answer to why God would allow our loved one to break our heart through the images of porn. That knowledge is not revealed to us. But we do have a promise. We are told “all things work for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” It might hurt to hear this right now, but God turns the evil in the world we live in to benefit believers. It might be to bring others to faith, it might be to strengthen our faith, it could be to help someone else who has been through the same struggle. There are countless ways in which God can bring good from bad. In a time of hurt, we aren’t given heavenly reasoning. We are asked to wait and trust.

After some time, God blessed Job with exponentially more than what he had before. I don’t know if God will extremely bless you after this hardship, but I do know God is faithful and will still work all things for your good. That “good” is that someday he will wrap up this valley in the shadow of death and let your cup overflow.

## Epilogue

***I will exalt you, Lord, for you lifted me out of the depths and did not let my enemies gloat over me. Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me. You, Lord, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit. Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.***

*Psalm 30:1-5*

The message of Christianity could be summarized this way: Life comes out of death.

The central teaching of our faith is that a man died, but did not stay dead. Since that is our reality, we know all the other things that feel like death are only temporary prisons that will eventually open to the freedom of Life.

As David wrote it, "Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." Sad things are real, but they are not forever. Life in Christ is forever. No matter how you feel as you finish reading this, it won't be forever. It can't be. Jesus is alive! Every second that ticks off the clock is one second closer to never-ending fulfillment in the presence of God. As we come closer to that day, we also know we are being conformed to the image of Christ through our sufferings.

Thank you for letting us walk with you in this difficult time. We pray for you, and trust Jesus to keep his promises to you.

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