
Y O U N G A D U L T S W E E K O F P R A Y E R : D A Y T W O

THE GOD WHO **SEES, HEARS—AND FEELS**

Imagine the scene: You are visiting a family member in the hospital. He has been sick for some weeks, with your extended family unsure as to whether he will recover. You have been away and this has been first opportunity to visit your suffering family member. You talk quietly with the patient's wife at the bedside of your sleeping loved one. She has been spending many long days and nights at the hospital during the past weeks and you urge her to go home to get some rest, assuring her that you will stay by the bedside for the evening.

She says she is doing OK but seems thankful for the opportunity for rest, though at the same time she is still hesitant to leave. She gathers her things and prepares to go, pausing to kiss the cheek of her sleeping and unwell husband. She gives you a quick hug and leaves the room, replaced almost immediately by a nurse who has come to check on the patient.

You step away from the bed to the window at the end of the room while the nurse goes through her routine. Looking out on the street in front of the hospital, you watch the traffic for a few moments, listening to the sounds of the busy hospital behind you. In the early evening light, you notice a distant but familiar figure emerge from the front of the hospital building and step out onto the street.

She was in the room with you a minute ago, now she is making her way home alone. Her shoulders are slumped, her head bowed, barely noticing the traffic around her. She walks slowly and, as you watch her, you can almost feel her tiredness and sorrow.

It's a lonely walk that she has done many times during the past few weeks and on many of those occasions no-one has seemed to notice. Removed from the street but also knowing the story behind her lonely walk and caring deeply for this suffering wife and her husband in the bed behind you, it occurs to you that this might be a glimpse into how God sees and has seen every one of her lonely walks out of that hospital during the past few weeks. And that He sees every one of the countless such walks taken by tired, sad, and worried relatives out of that hospital door each day. And all of the many patients—at every hospital . . .

For a moment, you want to rush after her, just to give her another hug and remind her

that God sees her too. But she has crossed the street and you cannot catch up with her for now. The nurse has finished with the patient and you seat yourself next to the bed. In that moment, you pray for this husband and wife in each of their struggles, you also pray for the nurse and the hospital and anyone else you can see at that moment. And while your heart aches with the enormity of the pain, you thank God that we are never alone, even in our darkest times.

The God who sees

It is a natural human response to suffering and injustice to cry out. Even if we are not sure to whom or what we cry, the act of crying out is a starting point in itself. But such cries are more pointed when directed at a God we believe to be good, who loves and wants the best for us. When experiencing tragedy, the "silence" of God can seem to mock the faithful sufferer. In the story of Job, for example, his physical sufferings

and losses were compounded by the questions raised about the nature of God and whether God had noticed His pain.

Yet, while we hear these questions echoing throughout the Bible and through human history, we also see God repeatedly introduced as a God who does see and hear the suffering of even "the least of these" (see Matthew 25). Amid all His creation, He notices even the fall of a single sparrow and, Jesus assures us, "you are worth more than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:31). It is a theme that returns through many stories of the Bible.

Hagar was in a difficult and traumatic family situation. She was an Egyptian by birth but we know nothing of the circumstances that found her taken away from her home country. As a servant in the household of Abraham and Sarah, Hagar was not able to choose where or how she would live. And when Sarah suggested her desperate plan for Abraham to have children, it is unlikely Hagar had any choice

in the matter. As bad as that idea seemed, it only became worse when the plan seemed like it was working. Sarah began to resent the pregnant Hagar and, as the situation became unbearable, Hagar ran away—a pregnant woman, alone in a foreign country, in the desert, perhaps fearing for her life.

But even in the depths of this injustice done to her and her extreme physical situation, Hagar was not really alone or forgotten. An angel came to her with a message that God had seen her predicament and she was not abandoned. He assured her that God was with her and working things out. The angel even gave her instructions about the baby she would have: “You shall name him Ishmael”—which means “God hears”—“for the Lord has heard of your misery” (Genesis 16:11). In her years of motherhood, every time she called her son’s name she would be reminded that in the worst situation of her life, God had witnessed her despair.

Hagar responded by giving a name to her God in return: “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’” (Genesis 16:13).

Not that everything went smoothly or fairly for her after this experience because a few years later she found herself in a similar situation, this time with her young son and about to die of thirst in the desert. Again an angel spoke with

her, assuring her that God had seen her situation and “heard the boy crying” (Genesis 21:17).

And from these experiences, we have one of the most profound and comforting names given to God—“the God who sees me.” It’s a name that anyone throughout history can call, whatever their circumstances, distress, or suffering. God sees.

The God who hears

A few centuries later, a whole group of people—descendants of the same family—were suffering, kept as slaves, abused by the Egyptians. Four hundred years is a long time to wait, especially when waiting in conditions of increasingly harsh slavery. God had promised that He would return to His people and bring them out of Egypt, but generation after generation was left to build the wealth and prestige of their idolatrous oppressors—and God seemed silent. Did He even notice their suffering? Had He forgotten them? Did He care?

Then God turns up. He appeared in a burning bush out in the remote desert to an unlikely leader—a fugitive prince and humbled shepherd named Moses. God gave the reluctant Moses a job to do and the first part of that job was to go back to the Israelites in Egypt with the message that God had heard and seen their oppression: “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because

of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering” (Exodus 3:7).

Yes, God did care. In fact, He was about to do something to dramatically change their situation. Not that it was automatic or instant. Their conditions in Egypt became worse before they were able to escape with God’s leading, and the fulfillment of the plan God had outlined to Moses took many years more. But, like Hagar, the realization that God had heard their cries for help was a significant turning point in their experience and in their relationship with God despite their circumstances: “when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped” (Exodus 4:31).

The God who feels

That God is a God who sees and hears the cries of the poor and oppressed is comforting. That God is a God who, in Jesus, has experienced and endured the worst of our world’s inhumanity, oppression, and injustice is astounding. Despite all the compassion and goodness Jesus demonstrated in His life and ministry, His death came as a result of hatred, jealousy, and injustice.

From Jesus’ anguished prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane to His arrest, “trials,” torture, mocking, crucifixion and death, He endured a gruelling ordeal of pain, cruelty, and evil, oppressive power. All of this was exacerbated by the innocence, purity, and goodness of the One who suffered it. Through the lens of salvation’s story, we see the beauty of Jesus’ sacrifice for us, but we should not forget the brutality of the suffering and injustice He experienced.

While the priests and religious leaders hated Jesus, they needed to find a charge they could press against Him. The trial they conducted contravened many of their established legal practices. It was a

farce—conducted with haste and expediency to reach their desired outcome. “Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree” (Mark 14:56). Even when the leaders brought Jesus to Pilate’s court, they still had not agreed on a relevant crime and Pilate “knew it was out of self-interest that they had handed Jesus over to him” (Matthew 27:18).

That Jesus was crucified after such strong statements from His judge confirming His innocence underlines the horrible injustice done to Him (see Isaiah 53:8). In Jesus, God knows what it feels like to be a victim of evil, injustice, and violence. God has so identified Himself with us in our broken and fallen condition that we cannot doubt His empathy, compassion, and faithfulness: “For we do not have a high priest [Jesus] 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).

In Jesus, God has experienced the depths of the pain and sorrow of this world. He sees, He hears, and He knows what our worst experiences feel like. He's been there.

Breaking the silence

Throughout the Bible's story, there is a repeated call from God's people—particularly those experiencing slavery, exile, oppression, occupation, poverty, or other injustice or tragedy—for God to intervene. The slaves in Egypt, the Israelites in Babylon, and many others called out to God to see and hear their suffering and to intervene to right these wrongs.

The Psalms are full of laments about the apparent prosperity and good fortune of the wicked, while the righteous are abused, exploited, and poor. The psalmist repeatedly calls on God to intervene, trusting that the world is not presently working in the way God created it or desires it, and taking up the cry of the prophets and oppressed. "How

long, O Lord?" (see, for example, Psalm 94:3-7). The people of God will always have a sense of impatience about injustice and poverty—and God's seeming inaction is another source of impatience.

But when we have heard God's voice and trusted in His care, mercy, and compassion for us—and all those who suffer in whatever ways—we become a voice for God amid the suffering and injustice of others. We might not be able to remove or remedy the suffering of others—ultimately, some situations and circumstances will only be set right in the process of God's final judgment and re-creation. But as people who know and trust a God who sees, hears, and feels, we are also called to share their pain, and to shine the light of God's mercy and love into their darkness. God hears, and we are one of the ways in which He speaks in response.

Imagine God watching that wife cross the road on her sad and lonely journey home. Imagine God walking through the corridors of a hospital in

your community. Imagine God watching a TV news broadcast and how He might respond. Imagine God hearing the stories of your neighbours who are going through a difficult time in their family's life. Imagine what He would like us to do to serve in our family, our community, and our world.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



- 1. How important is it to you that God is a God who sees the suffering of people in the world and hears their cries for help? What does this tell you about God?**
- 2. How does reflecting on the suffering and injustice Jesus experienced help you face suffering and injustice?**
- 3. How does God's compassion and concern for the "last, the least, and the lost" affect our attitudes and actions toward those in need around us?**