

My daughter, Ingrid, and I love to go on trips together. We seek adventures that consist of exploring small towns, their main streets and historic venues, as well as birdwatching and, identifying plants and enjoying the woods. Our journeys are somewhat aimless but the journey God has been taking me on is far from aimless. He has been very purposeful and it is not finished yet.

This journey is about bringing me closer to God and seeing myself the way He does. He chose me and sees me as his treasured possession. This allows me to have courage and hope and gives me peace that I could never experience otherwise.

Even though I became a Christian as a child I did not embrace the fullness of God's love and devotion to me. In thinking about this journey, I have found parallels between the story of Hagar in the bible and the spiritual path I have experienced.

Hagar was an Egyptian slave in the household of Abraham. She was the handmaid of Sarah, Abraham's wife. During her time living in Abraham's household she was given to Abraham to bear a child on Sarah's behalf because Sarah was barren. The pregnancy caused animosity and jealousy between Sarah and Hagar. As a result, Hagar fled into the wilderness. The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water and told her to return to Sarah. The angel of the Lord blessed her and gave her the promise of a multitude of descendants. Hagar's response to having been visited by the Lord is recorded in **Genesis 16 vs. 13**

She said, "You are the God who sees me." She also said, "Have I truly seen the One who sees me?" NLT

"The God who sees me" is the English translation for the Hebrew name of God, El-roi. There are many names for God, each describing one of his attributes. Hagar realized that God saw her situation and despite this He saw her and had a plan for her life and that of the unborn child.

Jeremiah 29 vs 11 records this for us:

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ESV

As an Egyptian slave, prior to her visit from the angel of the Lord, Hagar, did not foresee a hopeful future. She most likely felt unseen, invisible and undervalued. In my case, I was trapped by the stigma, shame and codependence common to a child of an alcoholic. It affected my self-worth and confidence. I became a pleaser and a peacemaker but my true self was hidden to others and to myself. God's love wasn't real to me.

Like Hagar, fleeing seemed to be a good choice. An out of area university was the answer, I even went as far as Germany for a year! But guess what? My insecurities followed me and when I returned nothing had changed!! God was with me the whole time and, although I felt alone, He was even holding my hand.

I fled a second time, without realizing that this was the case. I married what I thought was a Christian man and anticipated the idealist life I had in my head. It didn't become apparent right away but it turned out to be similar if not worse than my childhood. This time, along with the alcoholism severe mental illness was involved. I continued to go to church but I felt very much alone and unseen. It took my marriage falling apart for me to seek God's face more intensely. God started to break down the strongholds in my life. As I read the Bible and listened to sermons, certain verses spoke vividly to me. The healing process involved 3 concepts that I needed to embrace. They are

First, He sees and knows me intimately

Second, I no longer need to feel shame

Thirdly, He loves me deeply

He sees me

Just like with Hagar, God knows everything about me and is with me always. He sees my hurts, my feelings of inadequacies and also my joys. He not only sees me but walks along side me holding my hand. He was there right from the beginning of my life. Psalm 139 expresses it in a way that I can't.

Psalm 139 vs 1-14 ESV

O' Lord, you have searched me and know me!

You know when I sit down and when I rise up;

You discern my thoughts from afar.

You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O' Lord, you know it all together.

You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high; I cannot attain it.

Where shall I go from you Spirit?

Or where shall I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night."

Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are you works; my soul knows it very well.

I no longer needed to feel alone and unseen but also I knew that even though God knows my every secret he accepts me and requires nothing more than my willingness to allow him into every aspect of my life. This is the way to more confidence in my identity.

There is no shame

Shame is something I carried with me always. It was like a heavy weight that was oppressive. It followed me everywhere and affected my self-worth. An affirmation that I came across posted on my desk and repeated to myself helped. The saying is,

"I am the Righteousness of God in Christ." It is based on 2 Corinthians 5:21 which says

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. ESV

God sees those who have accepted his sacrifice as clean, holy and without reproach. What was needed is for me to acknowledge that God has wiped my slate clean. He doesn't see the messiness of my life. He sees that Jesus died for me and has forgiven all of my misdeeds. He no longer condemns me but sees me cleansed. Romans 8 vs 1 became a favourite.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ESV

I needed to see my identity in light of God's view of me.

His love for me

God's love is a keystone to my ability to walk with certainty. God loved and knew me before the foundation of the world and His love is so strong that it cannot be broken. In Romans 8 Paul lists a whole bunch of things that cannot separate us from God and he ends with

....indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. NLT

The verse that had the biggest impact on me is found in Zephaniah 3 vs 17.

... He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs. NLT

The God of the universe has a personal interest in me so much so that He sings over me in celebration of who I am! Realizing how much He loves me can calm any self-doubts that I have.

Believing that God sees and hears me, He does not hold me accountable and He loves me with an everlasting love has allowed me to finally use the gifts God has entrusted to me. It also allows me to move forward with power, and without fear.

At this point in my journey, I moved churches and it was a crucial step in the adventure God has taken me on. He brought me to Southridge at the right moment. I was ready to live abundantly and courageously. From the very beginning I felt at home in this space. I met wonderful people who accepted me as I was. It was one of the first places where I felt no judgement. I was able to try on my new identity by joining a life group and getting involved in the church. I had never done that before. The people in my life group and those in leadership were instrumental in my continuing transformation. I would like to thank Jon and Aimee Hand. His leading in our small group and Aimee for believing in me. Another couple who believed in me is Andrea and Bill.

My journey is not finished but with God's help I can continue on the trajectory He has set for me. My desire for you, is to also be confident in your identity in Christ.

There is a video that I will end with, thank you for listening today.

<https://youtu.be/ZsBhvSMQUk4?si=3VM1DvMY3BBUgOpB>