



DEVOTIONS IN THE WAKE OF #METOO

WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME?

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help? Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief. Yet you are holy.”

~ Psalm 22:1-3

Image is from the launch of my memoir, Ruined.

One ordinary Sunday night, I was the victim of a violent crime. It didn't matter that I'd been a "good girl" and gone to church earlier that day. My exemplary behavior was no talisman. It did not surround me like a magical shield. It did not keep my house safe from criminals.

In the wake of that trauma, I turned to the psalms of lament. The pleas in those verses gave voice to my own visceral sense of despair. Knowing I was not the first to feel this way was a small comfort—but a comfort nonetheless. Millennia ago, the psalmist felt abandoned by God. Even Jesus felt abandoned, quoting these verses from the cross. Psalm 22 reminded me that I was not entirely abandoned even in my experience of feeling abandonment.

The psalm doesn't stay where it begins; it ends by expressing a confident faith. "I will praise you in the great assembly," verse 25 says. But there's no need to rush through the psalm. Sometimes life has us lingering in the early verses. It's possible to voice our darkest lamentations and still be faithful.

If you're unfamiliar with feelings of abandonment, perhaps the face of someone you care about is coming to mind. Perhaps you've felt hesitant to reach out to her because of her pain. Emotional pain is alienating, even when it belongs to someone else. Receive Psalm 22 as a gift—the permission to express what seems inexpressible and the comfort of knowing that feelings of abandonment are part of the life of discipleship.

Reflect: *Read Psalm 22. What are some synonyms for the word abandoned? What moments from your own life story or that of others come to mind?*

Pray: *The very act of praying, even wordlessly, is a testimony to the power of what you believe: that you are not abandoned in your abandonment. Choose to spend time in quiet prayer today.*

more free resources available

www.rutheverhart.com



CARRYING MY SEXUAL SHAME

*"No, my brother!" Tamar cried.
"Don't be foolish! Don't do this to me!
Such wicked things aren't done in Israel.
Where could I go in my shame?"*

~ 2 Samuel 13:12-13

Tamar's story could be ripped from today's headlines: A vulnerable woman is preyed upon by a powerful man. A second man shows pity, only to use the situation as an excuse for revenge. The two men are historic enemies who fight over this situation, but it is the woman who loses.

Read the whole chapter of 2 Samuel 13 to better grasp the dynamics. What's unusual about this story is that all three characters are siblings and members of the royal family. Amnon (the rapist) plays second fiddle to Absalom (the revenger), who is the heir apparent to David's throne. Tamar's role, as the king's virgin daughter, becomes that of victim. Her power resides in her beauty and sexuality, but these are the very things that make her vulnerable. King David himself plays an unseen role, his abuse of Bathsheba forming a back-story to Tamar's plight as the sins of the fathers are visited upon the next generation.

Let's also pay attention to the advisor, Jonadab, who suggests a scheme to trap Tamar in Amnon's bedchamber. Jonadab's abound. The heart-wrenching verse quoted above is Tamar pleading with her brother. Her plea encompasses levels we may overlook. Not only is she protecting her physical and sexual self, but also her social self, which will be destroyed by this violation. What ended up happening was exactly what Tamar feared. After he raped her, Amnon "hated" her and refused to marry her, so Tamar ends up a "desolate woman."

The story of Tamar can break our hearts. It also reminds us that certain human stories repeat themselves. My own life echoes this story. Like so many others, I have been a rape victim. I read Tamar's story and grieve, yet am grateful that her plea was recorded in scripture. Her words reverberate, the cry of a victim challenging the church: Where can we go in our shame?

Reflect: *What are the assumptions at play about the roles of men and women?
Who will bear the shame of sexual sin?*

Pray: *Lift up victims/survivors of sexual assault. What names and faces come to mind?
Your own, or that of a sister, daughter, friend? Dare to amplify their pleas for help.*



BOLDLY SEEKING JESUS

The frightened woman, trembling at the realization of what had happened to her, came and fell to her knees in front of Jesus and told him what she had done. And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over.”

~ Mark 5:33-34

Image is from the Encounter Chapel in Magdala, Israel.

Her arm stretched through the crowd, hoping to touch Jesus' cloak. She didn't need to fasten onto the cloth, only to let her fingertips graze it. The power surged like lightning. Jesus felt it too. He asked: "Who touched my robe?" Can you imagine the woman's terror? Should she run, or should she account for her actions? She might have wished she could melt away. After all, what is more invisible than a middle-aged woman in a crowd?

Still, she came forward. She had broken fundamental laws and deserved punishment, but she came forward anyway. Her law-breaking was not because of her actions, per se, but because of the body she inhabited while doing those things. Women of childbearing age were always potentially unclean, but this woman was perpetually unclean due to constant menstrual bleeding. Yet she was out in public, touching people. She was breaking the purity laws.

We have much to learn from this unnamed lawbreaker. She was bleeding, she was desperate, but she also exemplifies the gifts that can follow deep pain: courage, boldness, audacity. If you have known her heartache, why not claim the gifts that can follow?

Are you feeling sick in body, mind, or spirit? Take every action that seems possible—and some that don't. With courage, walk toward the source of healing. Jesus will reward these actions. Hear how he praised her! "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over."

Jesus will say to you what he said to the bleeding woman — Jesus will call you *Daughter*.

Reflect: *Read the whole story from Luke 5. In what ways do you relate to this woman? How does she inspire or challenge you?*

Pray: *Invite God to show you next steps you can take for your own growth and healing.*



Image is from the Women's March in DC, from Wikipedia.

DEVOTIONS IN THE WAKE OF #METOO

SHE PERSISTED

"There was a judge in a certain city," Jesus said, "who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, 'Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.'" The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, 'I don't fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!'"

~ Luke 18:1-7

Sometimes Scripture is so familiar that we miss how outrageous Jesus can be. When Jesus told this parable, he chose a most unlikely hero. What's more, he put her in an unlikely setting. Widows in that day had few legal rights, yet Jesus praised this widow for seeking justice.

Does your story mirror hers? Mine does, which is no doubt why I love the widow so. I once felt marginalized by loss. I had to persist in seeking justice. And I ended up before a judge. Chances are you've been a victim seeking justice at some point, or know someone who has.

A courtroom is a remarkable place, enlivened by the ideal of justice. I waited a long time for my day in court. You might say I endured my own time of trial as I waited for the rapist's trial to begin. I have bodily memories of the day I finally took the witness stand. When the rapist attacked, he wielded the power because of his weapon. Now I, as a victim, wielded the power because of my words before a court of law.

Even so, testifying was difficult. It took persistence. I had to say things that "nice" women don't say in public, naming body parts and sexual acts. I had to speak these words before strangers who listened intently while a court reporter wrote them down.

We may think it's up to others to persist and speak truth to power. We may believe we should be quiet and submissive. This parable of Jesus sends a different message. He lifts every victimized woman from the margins and gives her a day in court. What's more, he says this is the kind of persistence with which we should seek God.

Reflect *When have you had to persist in seeking justice?
When have you stood by other women in their times of trial?*

Pray *Ask God to open this parable to you. What do you need to learn about persistence? What might God want you to understand about prayer? About justice? About Godself?*



DEVOTIONS IN THE WAKE OF #METOO

BEFORE & AFTER

Forget all that—it is nothing compared to what I am going to do. For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

~ Isaiah 43:18-19

The Judean desert. Image is my own, from a 2018 pilgrimage.

A single event cleaved my life in two. What had been a continuous life now consisted of two parts: before and after. Maybe you've experienced a similar watershed. Before the event you had one sort of life, and afterward you had a different sort entirely.

A cleaving experience involves loss. The before is gone, never to be regained. In the sort of paradox that language sometimes gives us, we cannot cleave to our *before* because our life has been cleaved into *after*. We can only go forward. In this circumstance, how is it possible to heed the voice of the prophet Isaiah? Can we trust that God will provide a pathway through the wilderness and water in the wasteland?

When I was the victim of trauma, my life became wilderness and wasteland. I believed that everything good about me had been ruined. All my freshness had been dried up. In fact, anything fresh seemed foolish and naive. My *after* self was tempted to despise my *before* self.

How could I be made new, as Isaiah says? I needed to reckon with my former self—to love her, but also to recognize that she had been forever cleaved from me. This involved journeying through grief. Eventually I found myself in a new place. This was not a full circle, simply returning to where I'd been, but a spiral. No longer founded on the naïveté of before or caught in the despair of after, my faith was newly confident in the goodness and love of God. How did I get there? The Spirit made the path.

Reflect: *If you could give your life chapter titles, what would they be?
Are some chapters "before" and other chapters "after"?*

Pray: *With God, prayerfully think through "before" or "after experiences" in your life.
How has God journeyed with you through those experiences?
How might God be at work creating a new beginning?
Be attentive to God's leading as you pray.*