Thwarted Plans

Have you ever been in a place where you have felt like everything was in order and you had these grand plans only for them to be taken away? Have you ever thought to yourself if I just do a, b, and c then I will get the results that I want and life just unfolds in a way that is utterly different from what you expected and what you planned?

Mary and Joseph, they knew that feeling. They were betrothed to be married which was important because in Jesus time especially, family was of utmost importance. The word family had a wider meaning both in Aramaic and in Hebrew than it does in English. The Hebrew, *ah*, and the Aramaic, *aha*, could be used to refer to brothers, sisters, half-brothers, half-sisters, cousins, and even other near relations. Extended family networks were both insisted upon and essential for survival. It was every Jewish person’s duty to maintain and depend upon these ties.

**Marriage** – Marriage in the scriptures is the heart of family. The very first direction that God gave to Adam and Eve was that a man should leave his father and mother cling to his wife, that the two should become one, and that they should increase and multiply.

 Marriage took place at a young age for the ancient Jews. Most rabbis proposed 18 as the most appropriate age for men to be married, but it wasn’t uncommon for them to be younger, especially in times of peace. Young women were married almost as soon as they were physically ready, approximately age 13.

**In most cases, marriages were arranged** by the respective parents. However, arranged marriages were seldom forced on young people who had absolutely no attraction to or interest in each other. Nevertheless, the view in the ancient world—and even in many places today—was that marriage was not so much about love and romance as it was about survival. Further, it was not merely the individuals who were married; the two families came together in mutual support. Beauty and romance, while considered pleasant things, were noted to be passing. Life and survival had to be based on sturdier foundations.

**When a future bride had been chosen** for a young man, either by his parents or more rarely by himself, there followed a period of one year called “betrothal.” During this time the couple still lived apart while delicate, often-protracted negotiations occurred between the families regarding dowries, etc. It was also understood that some money should be set aside for the woman to protect her in the event of her husband’s premature death.

Everything if you will was going according to plan. Mary and Joseph betrothed and getting ready for a marriage that would cement their to families together for the rest of their lives. Next would come the wedding celebration and all that is involved leading up to it and then a family and protection for Mary for the rest of her life because of Gods laws.

And then all of a sudden an angel appears to Mary and her life is thrown upside down. She is not going to have the usual wedding story. Mary and Joseph are no longer going to have the regular wedding. Mary is going to be divorced and she knows that this is a possibility because Joseph is not the father and knows it. Her life and Josephs turned upside down in the blink of an eye.

When life turns things upside down it is not easy to move forward. There is always some sort of grief that comes our way and when it comes from the world it is a little more understandable we know the world is a broken place, we know that terrible things happen in life.

We know that there are times when children are born with a short life expectancy because of a genetic disorder. We know that accidents happen all the time in the world, loved ones die from freak accidents, loved ones die in car crashes, people fall down in the middle of an activity due to a heart attack. We know that a fall out of nowhere can cause tragedy in any family. We know that viruses are all around us and can take us any day. We know that the terrible cancer can strike us at any moment no matter how well we took care of our bodies. We know that there are people who do evil things in the world and take other peoples lives.

All these things are tragic. All of these things are hard to deal with. All of these things have grief associated with them. All of these things knock us on our butts and cause us to take time to get back up again. All of this can cause us to feel like we are in the valley of the shadow of death. And yet these things feel like stuff we can run to God to and ask and seek and find our help and our refuge.

And yet what do we do when we feel like the one to whom we can run to, the one who I turn my eyes to in the hills where my help comes from, the one who is my rock and my salvation, the one who is my stronghold and my refuge, what happens when God is the one that I blame for the devastation in my life?

What happens when I pray to God day in and day out for a job and that job has not come? What happens when I pray for something day in and day out and I know God is faithful and yet the outcome does not fall my way? What happens when my child is sick and we know that God is the author and finisher of all that is and is the one capable of anything and everything and yet my child still dies?

What happens when the drugs I pray for my family member to stay away from ends up taking their lives and I blame God for not delivering? What happens when the doctor gave me a 90%chance to live and I just knew I was going to beat the cancer and I am told I am part of the 10%? What happens when the person I blame is the one whom I worship every day and I am just angry at God because I have to say goodbye to all the plans that I had? Birthdays that will never come, grandparents visits that cease to exist, paychecks that will no longer come, trips that are canceled, milestones never reached, and all you are left with are the tears of the pain that is inside bursting forth like a geyser?

If we are honest it has hard to go to God when we blame God for the pain we are feeling. Who likes to go to the source of their pain for relief, it make no sense. And when we are hurting and we blame God because it seems like God doesn’t care, or God didn’t act the way we wanted, or God didn’t seem to act period, it is important that we learn from Mary and Josephs experience about moving forward.

After Mary informs Joseph about what was going to happen, Jospeh is planning on getting a quiet divorce and removing himself from the situation, and then an angel comes down and talks to Joseph. Here’s the thing about God that is hard to remember when times are tough and yet its still true. When life takes an unexpected course, God does not wait for us to go to Him. God comes right down to us to help. Now I know that in this context Mary eventually gets the outcome she was going to have if she had not become pregnant and that is not the case for everyone who has found themselves blaming God for them being in the pits of life. You cannot replace the lost of life, its impossible, some situations will cause us to have a new normal. And the only way to get to that new normal is through the action of God.

Even if we do not know it, God is the vessel through which we are able to get back up and keep moving forward. The reason being is because, God, our benevolent and gracious God, knows what pain is. He knows what disappointment feels like and He knows how stubborn mankind is because He created all things ([Colossians 1:16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+1%3A16&version=NIV)), knows all things ([Psalm 139](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+139&version=NIV)), and can experience in perfect matrimony, all things. God is not only the creator of what is visible but what is invisible ([Colossians 1:16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+1%3A16&version=NIV)). This includes everything in the spiritual realm, including our emotional state.

God knows first hand what pain is. [Psalm 56:8](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+56%3A8&version=NIV) states, “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.” While being pursued by his enemies, David had the wisdom to write these words. Mark D. Roberts says that:

THIS IS QUINTESSENTIALLY THE VERY THING WE WANT FROM GOD; FOR HIM TO SEE US AND FOR HIM TO SEE, DEAL, AND ERADICATE OUR PAIN. WHEN WE ARE HURTING, WE WANT GOD TO BE AWARE OF US. OF COURSE, WE DESIRE HIS HELP AND HEALING. BUT, ALMOST MORE THAN THIS, WE WANT TO KNOW THAT HE IS STILL THERE, THAT HE KNOWS AND CARES FOR US.

Being reminded of Gods faithfulness, and God’s care is what will allow us to do three things.

1. pour our heart out to God. This shifts the focus from your struggles onto Gods might.
* [Psalm 61:2](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+61%3A2&version=NKJV) – “From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”
* Matthew 11:28-29 – “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”
1. Be still and experience the presence and power of God.
* [Psalm 46:10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+46%3A10&version=NIV) – He says, “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”
1. Surround yourself with seasoned Christians. Those who will speak only life into your spirit.
* [Ecclesiastes 4:12](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes+4%3A12&version=NIV) – Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.
* [Proverbs 11:14](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+11%3A14&version=NIV) – For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.

There are many other ways to deal with pain but those are the three every Christian can utilize. Everyone experiences pains, and while the size and scope may vary, our source of help does not. God is constant in His goodness. God loves you in your finest moment and your darkest hour.

If you are experiencing pain today please know that you have a God that cares for you and Jesus knows your pain. Your situation may seem impossible, but God makes the impossible, possible. No word from God will ever fail (Luke 1:37). There will be a day when pain, mourning, and crying will be permanently defeated (Revelation 21:4). Let us then, brothers and sisters, operate in hope and complete faith in anticipation of that day.