

# Shalom and Healing from Trauma

*A Bible study using the stories of women in scripture ·*

The Hebrew word shalom is usually translated as “peace.” But it means far more than the absence of conflict. Shalom is wholeness; the restoration of every broken relationship, every fractured part of ourselves, every wound that trauma has opened.

Shalom is what God intends for every person and every community. Some of the clearest pictures of shalom in scripture come through the stories of women whose worlds were torn apart.

We are going to look at some of their stories and see where God brought Shalom in the suffering of their lives.

## KEY CONCEPT — SHALOM

Theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff defines shalom as “just relationship, harmonious relationships and enjoyable relationships.” N.T. Wright argues that Jesus’ healing miracles are gifts of God’s shalom, not merely removing symptoms, but restoring a person to full participation in life, community, and relationship with God. Shalom is the goal of healing from trauma.

## Hagar: Seen in the Wilderness

*“You are the God who sees me... I have now seen the One who sees me.”*

— Genesis 16:13 (NIV)

### HAGAR

*Genesis 16 & 21*

Hagar was enslaved, used, and cast into the desert. Not just once, which would have been bad enough, but twice. She had no status, no rights, and no community. She sat down and said, “Do not let me watch the boy die.” She wept. That experience, the fear of losing a child, is one which too many mothers have known. In that moment of absolute desolation, God appeared. And Hagar did something no one else in scripture did: she gave God a new name. *El Roi*. The God who sees. The beginning of her shalom was not being rescued from her circumstances. It was the knowledge that she was not invisible. She was seen. And when we are seen, we know that we matter.

Trauma frequently produces the conviction that no one can see what has really happened. No one understands what you have been through, not fully, not honestly.

Hagar names the first movement of her healing. This is when she is genuinely seen by someone who does not look away. God knows her for who she is. Not for her role, her position, her status, or her capacity. But simply for who she is.

This is the beginning of Shalom.

## Naomi: The Right to Rename Your Pain

*“Don’t call me Naomi... Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.”*

— Ruth 1:20 (NIV)

### NAOMI

*Ruth 1–4*

Naomi had lost her husband and both her sons. She experienced an incredibly significant and life-changing loss. When she returned to Bethlehem, people called her by her name, which means “pleasant.” She refused it. She insisted on the truth of her lived experience. She changed her name to *Mara*. Bitterness. Not as self-pity, but as honest testimony. Naomi would not pretend that things were ok when they weren’t. She did not just go along to make other people comfortable, even if that would have been easier. And in refusing to pretend, she opened the door to the extraordinary grace that followed in Ruth’s faithfulness and Boaz’s kindness. For Naomi, Shalom began with honesty.

The church sometimes asks people in pain to stay pleasant and to pretend that things are ok when they aren’t. They are pushed to perform gratitude before they have been permitted to grieve. Naomi shows us that healing requires the freedom to name bitterness as bitterness. We can only heal when we can be honest about the pain we are experiencing and the suffering we have endured. The shalom that came to her came through, not around, the truth.

## The Bleeding Woman: Agency Restored

*“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”*

— Mark 5:34 (NIV)

### THE WOMAN WITH THE HAEMORRHAGE

*Mark 5:25–34*

For twelve years, she had been excluded. She was ritually unclean, socially isolated, and financially ruined by doctors who could not help. She wasn’t allowed to go and worship in the Temple, and she wasn’t supposed to touch anyone in a crowd. She touched Jesus anyway. It was an act of extraordinary, desperate agency that put her in very real danger. She was breaking the Jewish Law and was risking making Jesus ritually unclean by touching him. Jesus’ response is simple; it changed everything. He called her daughter. Imagine that. In that moment, lonely and despairing, she was held by his words. Jesus was restoring her to her family and a sense of belonging. Then, he told her to go in peace. The Greek word for “healed” here is *sozo*. It is the same word used for salvation. Healing and saving are one word in the New Testament. Salvation meant being restored, not only in body, but also socially. Her shalom included being known, named, and sent.

Trauma often strips away agency. Trauma can leave us feeling powerless over what happens to us. This woman reclaimed her agency. Her healing was not only physical. It was the restoration of her place in community, her identity as daughter, and her capacity to act. When we need healing, we have to start by knowing that we are allowed to ask for it.

## What the Women Teach Us About Shalom

These three women show us that shalom is not a feeling. It is the restoration of identity, relationship, agency, and voice. Hagar needed to be seen. Naomi needed to be honest. The bleeding woman needed to belong again.

Each of them encountered God not in triumph but in the middle of their trauma. And each of them left that encounter more whole.

This is what healing from trauma looks like, theologically. It is not the removal of what happened. It is the restoration of what was taken: dignity, voice, relationship, and the sense that we matter to God and to our community.

### REFLECTION SPACE — SHALOM AND HEALING

**A prayer to begin:** *Lord, let me be as honest as Naomi, as brave as the woman in the crowd, and as certain as Hagar that you see me. Amen.*

- Which of these three women resonates most with your own experience, and why?
- What does Hagar's naming of God as El Roi mean to you — what would it mean to be truly seen in your pain?
- Naomi refused to pretend. Where in your community is there pressure to stay "pleasant" rather than honest?
- The bleeding woman's healing included belonging — being called daughter. What would genuine belonging feel like for someone healing from trauma in your corps?
- If shalom is "wholeness in every dimension of life" — which dimension feels most broken right now? Which feels most restored?

### My Reflections:

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