

In January 1996, nine-year-old Amber Hagerman was riding her bicycle on a warm Saturday afternoon in Arlington, TX when someone saw a man drive up, grab Amber off her bike, throw her screaming into his truck, and drive away at a high speed. Four days later her body was found.

Naturally the entire Metroplex was horrified by this event and people began to think about what to do. Someone suggested that radio stations might broadcast news bulletins about abducted children. That idea developed into the Amber Alert program. Begun locally, today it’s an international volunteer program and has saved 495 children by galvanizing law-enforcement agencies, broadcasters, the transportation industry, the internet, and the community to assist in the search for and safe recovery of a missing child.¹

This program rose out of the horrendous pain of Amber’s death and the concern for other children who might need help.

In Bible times there were some other people in pain too, who needed help. Let’s read about it.
READ EXODUS 2:23-25

Years passed, and the king of Egypt died. But the Israelites continued to groan under their burden of slavery. They cried out for help, and their cry rose up to God. ²⁴ God heard their groaning, and he remembered his covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵ He looked down on the people of Israel and knew it was time to act.

God was aware of their pain and wanted to help. Listen to the verbs once again:

- Their cry rose up to God
- God looked down, saw what Egypt was doing, and heard their groaning
- God remembered his promise
- God knew it was time to act

The world is full of people oppressing one another, enslaving one another, warring with one another, or abusing one another. This happened from the very first family who lived on the earth. God is always aware of people’s pain:

After Cain killed Abel God said to Cain, “What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!” (Gen 4:10)

Another time Jesus was talking about how he felt about people who abuse children. He said:

“Woe to the one who puts a stumbling block before a child; it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Matt 18:6).

God and Jesus both share concern about people’s pain. And that’s why Jesus came down – to deliver you.

If you have been mistreated or abused or injured or robbed of dignity or oppressed, heaven help the perpetrator of evil on judgment day. In the meantime, the Psalmist paints God as leaning down, noticing, and coming to the rescue:

¹ <http://www.amberalert.gov/>

Ps 34:17-19 ¹⁷When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears, and rescues them from all their troubles. ¹⁸The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit. ¹⁹Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD rescues them from them all.

Ps 37:13 but the LORD laughs at the wicked, for he sees that their day is coming.

God acted in history, God acts today, and in the future God’s wrath will be expressed against evil. In the meantime, the Psalmist urges us to trust God:

Ps 50:15 ⁵Call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

Does God intercede and prevent all evil from happening ahead of time? No. This world is filled with evil and pain. The apostle Paul experienced extreme difficulties: He writes in 2 Corinthians:

⁸ We do not want you to be unaware of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. ⁹Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again. (1:8-10)

So the pain helped Paul to set his hope on God’s miracles. And that’s exactly God’s plan for Israel in this passage. Let’s read it. READ Exodus 3:1-12

If you had been there on that mountain going about your daily shepherding duties, would you have been drawn to that great sight?

Think about Moses. It’s been a long time. Forty years to be exact. Forty years since he left Egypt. Forty years of living as an alien in the desert. Forty years of nothing happening. Maybe that’s why he turned to see this sight!

Would you turn aside to check it out if God appeared to you? You have the opportunity every day – not in your spare time but it only comes in committed time – when we read our daily Bibles, and open ourselves to the surprise of God’s appearance.

And Moses opened himself to this surprise. Moses removed his sandals, bowed down and listened.

God is looking for people who turn aside to look, who will bow down and listen. Even though God is God, God thinks it’s worth it to step into our world when we cry to Him. You are the catalyst that makes it happen.

Do you believe that God sees your trouble? Do you believe God comes down? If you question whether God cares perhaps you need to develop the habit of turning aside. Stop what you are doing. Do what Moses did. He opened himself to God; he stopped walking. And God allowed him to stand on holy ground.

As Moses responded, God stepped in to deliver not only the nation, but one small man with a lot of pain. He had been humbled, isolated, and beat down by life’s circumstances, but that’s what

made him ready for God’s work. That’s how God changed him from a man who took matters into his own hands to one who would take off his sandals and listen.

Now he was on holy ground. Things would be different. No more would Moses’ failures control his life because God showed up. And God is a God of miracles. Just look at the burning bush.

Because Moses turned aside it was a whole new beginning. It was hard for him to grasp at first. Moses said, “What makes you think I could do such a mighty task? How can I go to Pharaoh and bring all these people out?” Like Moses we, sometimes we get in the habit of living in the past; of being a failure.

But God was not dissuaded. God had heard the Amber Alert. God had had enough of Egypt’s abuse and nothing would stop God from rescuing His children. God would bring them to freedom. And we must join with God and embrace the new.

In 1841, a man named Solomon Northup was born a freeman in the “free state” of New York.² Living in Sarasota, married with three children, one day he was lured by two seemingly trustworthy gentlemen into a bordering slave state, kidnapped, and then sold into slavery. He was sold numerous times, experiencing heartbreaking circumstances of, “unutterable wrong, sorrow, and despair” (11).

Even though he was free; once enslaved there was no way out. Solomon wrote, “I commended myself to the God of the oppressed . . . and bitterly wept” (20).

But even though his circumstances were crushingly brutal at times, like Paul, he also found himself the recipient of God’s kindness and protection again and again as God made a way for him to survive through one person here or there who helped him. Then, miraculously, after 12 years by chance he met a Christian man from the same area in New York to whom he risked telling his story. That man secretly wrote a letter to people in Sarasota. Upon hearing it, another man took it upon himself to travel for months to southern Louisiana to secure Solomon’s release. But Mr. Northup had been moved once again. He was not even known by his real name. But by extraordinary chance meetings the man happened to cross paths with the right people at the right time until the two were connected and he gained Mr. Northup’s release. It was a miracle that this man was restored.

Our God seeks to rescue us in just that way. God uses people who turn aside to God and say yes, then weaves His way through impossible human circumstances to bring victory for his children and honor for Himself. We see God’s attitude in Jesus, who lived to deliver us from all evil and indeed has. God’s attitude continues in all of you who say yes to God’s call.

Do you have the confidence that God can use you? God extends an invitation of a lifetime. His promise? “I will be with you.” You can count on the promise. Will you turn aside to see this great thing? In doing so we gain freedom, freedom to stand and worship a holy God. It’s that worship (shoes off, bow to the ground) that rescues us from all oppression.

²This story is told by Solomon Northup in *Twelve Years a Slave*, ed. Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: La. State Univ. Press 1996), 12.

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Amber Alert – God’s Version
Exodus 2:23-3:12

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AMEN