



shalem Digest

FALL 2012

TOPICS OF INTEREST TO FRIENDS OF SHALEM MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK

Hope in the Presence of Pain

BY SUSAN WINTER FLEDDERUS

Each of us knows someone who is in pain. Whether from grief, illness, broken relationships, abuse or harassment, job loss, or other painful circumstance, someone in our circle is suffering. At times each of us experiences pain and suffering in our own lives. Perhaps even now we are dealing with deep emotional pain of some kind.



Often pain isolates us from others. It can disrupt relationships and community, leaving us feeling disconnected from personal, social and spiritual resources. We can feel abandoned and let down. And then we may begin to lose hope—that devastating experience where the door to a meaningful future feels like it’s closing. How then can hope be restored?

LAMENT AND LONGING

“How long will this trouble continue?” “This hurts so much!” “Isn’t there any help?” We may find ourselves calling out in our pain. As we cry out, our pain and longing express the depth of our suffering. Our cry becomes a plea for someone to hear and take notice. Often the lament is not directed to anyone—it is simply a deep expression of pain and loss, even the loss of hope.

Some people direct their lament as a plea explicitly aimed at God: “How long, O God? Turn and answer!” This is a common cry that goes all the way back to the Biblical book of Psalms. Others, not daring to even believe in a God at all, still find themselves compelled to lament. For all of us, our very groans are an expression of longing for something better, and for some response.

LAMENT IS THE BEGINNING OF HOPE

Yet remarkably, the cry of lament is the

beginning of hope. The Biblical Psalms of Lament illustrate a deep and profound mystery: it is in the midst of lament that room is created for hope to be restored.

When we are feeling the most overwhelmed and lost, even our silent groans become a cry for help. They express our hope that someone will hear and care. Often our longing is for someone in our family or community to hear us, and to recognize the pain we are experiencing. We need to know that we matter, that the fact that we are in pain matters to someone. To be connected with another in the midst of pain is to experience some comfort.

Having someone else share in our expressions of lament opens space for us to hope again. Hope, in other words, depends on connection and community.

EXPRESSIONS OF HOPE

Not surprisingly, the field of mental health and social work has put names to the deeply human process whereby lament, or crying out in pain, opens up the space for hope in our lives.

Research on relationships shows that having an emotional attachment to a significant other helps people to cope with the hopelessness caused by pain and trauma. Ottawa therapist Sue Johnson, child psychologist Dan Hughes and others who study love and attachment in relationships have found that lack of a secure connection with others makes it hard to deal with trauma and pain, while secure attachment in our important relationships helps to soothe and comfort, to manage strong emotions, and to protect us from the harmful effects of painful and traumatic situations. ▶

Similarly, social worker Michael Ungar has found that resilience—the ability to bounce back under highly adverse circumstances—depends on our connections with others and our access to a meaningful and responsive community. Resilience has to do with the proverbial “village” that it takes to raise a child, one that we never outgrow our need of. When our “village” provides us with meaningful connections with others and with ideas, information and resources, then we have a chance to be resilient, to overcome painful situations—and to have hope for the future.

HOLDERS OF HOPE

This raises the question of how we can best respond when we encounter someone in pain in our personal relationships, our families, and our communities. How do we connect with others so as to become holders of hope and

raisers of resilience? How do we give comfort, without slipping into giving glib reassurances or pat advice? How do we share someone’s pain, walk with them through their grief or suffering, and provide a genuine connection that will help to meet their needs? What does it look like to share a secure emotional connection that fosters hope?

Often the first place to start is to join someone in their lament.

When someone shares their lament with us, we may recoil from the pain they express. Our own discomfort with the depth of another’s pain might get us to try to fix, advise, or reassure them. Subtly perhaps, we may minimize, dismiss, or turn away from hearing about their painful experiences, leaving them feeling more disconnected and isolated than before.

But if we can put aside our own discomfort to listen and be present with the other person in their pain, they will likely feel heard and understood, and experience a sense of someone feeling the pain along with them. This is the emotional attachment that helps to soothe emotional pain, to build a community that supports resilience, and so to open the door to hope.

COMMUNITIES OF HOPE

Moreover, when we hear someone’s lament and our own hearts cry out with them, the lament becomes a shared intercession. Our shared intercession holds hope in something or someone bigger than ourselves and the present situation. In communities of faith, lament, including the shared lament of intercession, is a cry to God, a plea for help from the one known to be bigger than us and bigger than the circumstances we are caught in.

Lament then becomes an expression of hope and trust in a God of steadfast love and faithfulness, a God of mercy, and a God who restores relationship. This is not a hope based in wishful thinking. It is not “cheap hope”, nor is it false optimism. Instead it is hope embedded in a belief that God sees the suffering of all people—and cares. Intercession involves hope in a God who never leaves us or forsakes us. It embodies a belief in God’s promise for plans to give us a hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).

So when we are facing suffering and pain, let’s cry out! Let’s lament, with the expectation and assurance that this is the entryway, the gateway through we can experience renewed hope.

Like the Psalmist, let’s engage in the practice of lament (see Psalm of Lament for an example). We need not fear lament. When we encounter someone who shares their pain, let’s join them in their cry. Through shared lament, we can become the safe haven for our partner, family member or friend, the one with whom they begin to feel emotional connection and closeness in the midst of their pain. We can hold them up to the God of Hope as we intercede for them.

Let’s become communities of lament, communities of hope.

And Hope will not disappoint us. ▶

SHALEM—Restoring Hope

So often at Shalem, counselling sessions, restorative circle conversations, WrapAround meetings and engagement with street-involved youth at RE-create echo with cries of lament, pain and longing. Yet, Shalem’s tag-line, printed on our letterhead and business cards, and prominent on our website, is “Restoring Hope.” That’s what we’re all about.

Over two full days, in July and October, we gathered as a staff to reflect on what “restoring hope” means in our work. How do we help to restore hope with people who are hurting? During our “Days of Hope,” Shalem Board Member Michael Maher led us in in-depth reflections on Biblical hope, showing us from Scripture that lament is the beginning of hope. We are grateful to Michael for sharing his insights about hope, lament, intercession, the God of Steadfast Love, and so much more.

These two-day reflections form the beginning of a year of explicit exploration by our staff on where and how we experience hope restored, for both the people we are privileged to walk alongside of and ourselves as practitioners.

That includes “practicing lament”—see the “Psalm of Lament” written by Susan Winter Fledderus after our staff day of hope.

Lament has touched us deeply and personally at Shalem: our much-loved psychotherapist at Shalem, Gord Hope, was recently diagnosed with an acute form of leukemia. As a community, we suffer with Gord, and we marvel at his deep, real hope in God. Please hold up Gord with us in “shared lament” to God.

We would like to invite the broader Shalem community to contribute as we continue to have many more conversations about how hope is restored. If you have a story of hope restored that you would like to share with us, please email Susan at susanwf@shalem-network.org.

Shalem Board Member Michael Maher holds Master’s degrees in Developmental Psychology and in Biblical Studies. He recently retired as the founding Executive Director of a property casualty insurance and employee benefits program for Catholic Religious Congregations and is a former a high school teacher and principal. You can keep up with his work on restorative justice through his daily eNewsletter, “Smart Justice”, available at: info@smartjustice.com.



Gord Hope, Ph.D.

Psalm of Lament

How long, Oh Lord?

How long must your servant endure?

How long will she face taunting and racism, discrimination and isolation?

Oh Lord, her heart grows sad within her, laughter is removed from her, her weight drops, she cannot eat, her motivation to work withers.

Oh Lord, she is brought down to the floor. In the corner she huddles, contemplating ways to end the pain.

And yet she waits for you, praying for release.

She fasts and cries out, pleading for wisdom and humility to answer her tormenters even as she seeks to leave their cruel company.

Oh Lord, turn and answer; do not be far off. Listen and lift her out of this dark place, set her up with companions who respect her, with company who will esteem her rightly. Give her work in pleasant places, and provide for her family.

For she trusts in your purpose, your plans for her are right and good. And you are in control.

Susan Winter Fledderus, 2012

Acknowledgements:

The ideas in this article have been shaped by many conversations and sources. I am particularly indebted to Shalem Board member Michael Maher for his ideas on Biblical hope, lament and intercession (see Shalem—Restoring Hope), to Sue Johnson and Dan Hughes for their ideas on attachment and resilience in the face of trauma, to Michael Ungar’s work on the role of community in resilience, and to my colleagues at Shalem for sharing on our Days of Hope and in many follow-up conversations.

Susan Winter Fledderus, M.Ed., R.S.W., RMFT, is Shalem’s Clinical Director. Susan is an Approved Clinical Supervisor with the Ontario Association of Marriage and Family Therapy and an Instructor in Solution-Focused Therapy at the University of Toronto’s School of Social Work. She will continue at Shalem after Jennifer Bowen returns to the Clinical Director position from her maternity leave.



For Further Reading...

Sue Johnson (2008), *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*. New York: Little Brown & Co.

Daniel Hughes (2006), *Building the Bonds of Attachment: Awakening Love in Deeply Troubled Children*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Michael Ungar (2007), *Too Safe for Their Own Good: How Risk and Responsibility Help Teens Thrive*. Toronto: McLelland and Stewart.

Many of Shalem’s staff have taken, and continue to take, training from Sue Johnson (www.iceeft.com), Dan Hughes (www.danielhughes.org) and Michael Ungar (www.michaelungar.com). Our counselling work leans heavily on the clinical insights of Drs. Johnson and Hughes. In partnership with Dr. Ungar and his Resilience Research Centre at Dalhousie University, we are using Dr. Ungar’s normed and validated “resilience” measurement tools in our WrapAround work with families.

Shalem is committed to best practices in mental health and is a member of Family Service Ontario. All services are offered in strictest confidence.

Shalem Digest is a publication of Shalem Mental Health Network, a non-profit, charitable organization. RN 130566011 RR00011

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Mental Health Network
Celebrating 50 Years

{ DIRECTOR'S CORNER }



MARK VANDER VENNEN,
MA, M.ED, R.S.W.
Executive Director

SHALEM AT 50 YEARS!

Dear friends of Shalem,

It's time for all-out celebration—2013 is Shalem's 50th Anniversary!

And celebrate we shall. Shalem's Board and staff have been busy preparing for a year of 50th Anniversary celebration events and activities. Our goal? First, to thank God for the gift of the faith-filled vision that inspired Shalem's founders—the same vision, in a new form, that drives Shalem today. And second, to position Shalem to meet emotional and mental health needs for the next many years, perhaps even the next 50!

Watch for:

- ✦ a worshipful **50th Anniversary launch**: services of praise and thanksgiving at Holland Christian Homes in Brampton and similar venues in January, 2013—to thank God for Shalem's 50 years, to commend to God our Anniversary plans, and to honour Shalem's founding generation, a generation whose sacrificial support of Shalem continues to be critical today.
- ✦ launch of an **eNewsletter**: communication six times per year about Shalem news and prayer requests—a way to stay in touch with all things Shalem.
- ✦ a ramped up Shalem **Social Media** presence on Twitter, Facebook and Blogging—a deliberate effort to engage the next generation.
- ✦ an exciting **public Anniversary event** with a high-profile speaker in the Fall of 2013—in the works.
- ✦ celebratory materials for churches in support of **Mental Health Week** in May, 2013.
- ✦ **50@50**: a campaign to reach 50 churches with our Congregational Assistance Plan (CAP) by 2014. As of this writing, 25 churches (and growing) find that CAP

enhances their ministries; not one church that has started with CAP has since stopped it. CAP enables congregations to make available to all of their members high quality, local professional Christian counselling, anonymously and at no cost to the parishioner.

A 50TH CAMPAIGN

But that's not all. What better way is there to honour the legacy given us by the founders of Shalem than to fully implement our sustainable business plan over the next three years?

A key component is our 50th Anniversary Fundraising Campaign.

Our goal is to raise \$400,000 over the course of the Campaign—from the Fall of 2012 through the Spring of 2014—and with that to develop the capacity to raise \$400,000 each year thereafter.

We are confident we can make it! *Already a faithful supporter has donated \$150,000 towards our \$400,000 goal.* We are looking for two or three people or businesses to together match that \$150,000. That would leave a balance of \$100,000 to raise over the next 18 months.

These targets are achievable. Please support Shalem generously in this Anniversary Campaign. Every amount, small or large, is significant and makes a tangible difference in

the lives of the people we serve. Please join us in this way in our celebration and thanksgiving.

Our commitment to you is a relationship based on mutual service and partnership, sound, transparent and sustainable financial management—and especially first-rate service to people need.

I would love to hear from you—please email me at markvv@shalemnetwork.org. Please don't hesitate to make contact—I will send you a prospectus and would love to come visit you.

AWE-INSPIRING BEGINNINGS

Standing on the brink of our 50th Anniversary, I am in awe of the original vision and dedicated sacrifices that give birth to Shalem and have sustained it over its history. We take that heritage very seriously and consider it a trust to be nurtured and protected.

Thank you to each one of you who supports Shalem with your prayers, your advocacy with and for people who struggle because of mental illness, and your financial support. With God's leading, we look forward to a bright future of service together!

Let's let our hearts be refreshed in Christ,



shalem

Mental Health Network
Celebrating 50 Years

“REFRESHING HEARTS IN CHRIST”

Our Campaign theme is drawn from Philemon 1:20: “refreshing hearts in Christ”. The Campaign is overseen by a Board committee and an Honourary Chair, and guided by a foundational “Case for Support” document filled with real-life stories of people whose lives have been changed by Shalem. And we are pleased to unveil our special Anniversary logo!

Upcoming Shalem Workshops!

Promoting Resilience in Youth and Young Parents at Risk: Dr. Linda Liebenberg
January 22, 2013

FaithCARE: Learning How to Grow Restorative Churches
February 5 - 7, 2013

For more information and to register, call 866-347-0041, email office@shalemnetwork.org or visit www.shalemnetwork.org