

Genesis/Abram's Shortcut/Chapter 16

MAIN POINT

Shortcuts do not promote God's purpose. We need to faith and wait for the Lord's promises.



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

ICE BREAKER QUESTION: When you are facing a difficult situation, do you rely on the comfort and support of other people or do you tend to handle it on your own? Explain.

Some of us love to be around people as often as possible. Others of us need alone time to feel rejuvenated, even though we enjoy the company of good friends. But it is safe to assume that no one likes to be alone all the time. Loneliness can be a scary feeling, and it oftentimes leaves us feeling insecure and isolated from others. Hagar, Sarai's slave, felt alone in her abuse and anger, so she ran from home. What God showed her and us through that experience is that no matter how alone you feel, He sees and knows each one of us and is always working in our circumstances for our good and His glory.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **What insight, lesson, or observation from this weekend's message did you find to be the most helpful, eye-opening, or troubling? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**
2. **What motivated Sarah to ask Abraham to have a child with their servant, Hagar? What does this request tell us about the state of Sarah and Abraham's faith?**

At 75 years old, Sarah assumed she was past childbearing age. All she knew of God's promise (Gen. 12:1-3) was that she and Abraham would have an heir, so Sarah took the initiative to provide that heir by using Hagar, her servant, as a surrogate mother. While this was a custom in their day, and Sarah and Abraham didn't know how God's plan would unfold, their action revealed a lack of trust in God's ability to provide. When the situation appeared hopeless, Abraham and Sarah momentarily forgot the promises of God and turned to their own devices.

Griffith Thomas said it well:

“Though Sarah’s motive was good, genuine, and involved self-sacrifice, the proposal was wrong in itself, and, at the same time, wrong in its method of obtaining the end sought. It was wrong against God., Whose word has been given and Whose time should have been waited. It was wrong against Abraham, leading him out of the pathway of patient waiting for God’s will. It was wrong against Hagar, and did not recognize her individuality and rights in the matter. It was wrong against Sarah herself, robbing her of a high privilege as well as leading to disobedience”

3. Have you ever tried to take matters into your own hands rather than trusting and waiting on God? What does taking matters into your own hands imply what you believe about God?

Encourage people in the group to be honest and share personal experiences. Hughes gives a good warning on this scenario:

“Not a few times I have had believers in my office whose resort to expedience’s in order to hurry what they believed to be God’s will has resulted in humanly unsolvable problems. In fact, some situations have been so complicated that there can be no solution in this life. There is grace, of course. But some sins are such that the results cannot be taken back. And the pain goes on and on in this world”

4. How did Sarah’s jealousy affect Hagar and Ishmael? What effects have you seen in your life and the lives of those around you when you’ve given into jealousy?

Abraham had a history of taking matters into his own hands when He started to doubt God’s involvement. In this situation, his and Sarah’s mistake had immediate consequences. Sarah was filled with jealousy, their marriage suffered discord, and Hagar felt contempt toward Sarah. Hagar had no choice but to comply with their scheme, and by the time the baby was actually born, Sarah rejected him. The sad truth is that Sarah and Abraham’s jealousy had consequences not only for them, but also for the people around them.

Hughes stated the way Hagar was treated well:

“It is so much easier when you depersonalize those you abuse”

Scripture also speaks to how jealousy affects our lives as well in the verses below:

James 3:16 (NIV)

¹⁶For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

5. Look at verses 7-12. Why did God prevent Hagar from fleeing? What does this tell us about God?

If anyone had reason to be bitter, it was Hagar. And yet, despite the bitter persecution she received at the hands of Sarah, Hagar trusted God's Word and returned to serve Sarah and Abraham. We don't know why God chose to seek out Hagar and command her to return but His reassurance to Hagar that she would have a son is a demonstration of his unmerited kindness. Hagar clearly interpreted God's Words to her as a demonstration of His grace as she called the LORD "The God Who Sees" (v. 13), indicating that God saw and answered her in her affliction. Recognizing God's presence and grace in our lives is a great first step to overcoming the jealousy that so easily consumes us.

There are great verses below on how God sees us:

Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)

¹⁰ So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Proverbs 15:3 (NIV)

³ The eyes of the LORD are everywhere,
keeping watch on the wicked and the good.

6. How did Hagar respond to God's Word that was delivered to her through the angel of the LORD (vv. 13-14)?

She responded in faith. Hughes states it well with this quote:

"Hagar realized that all her knowledge of God depended on his initiative in knowing her. When she felt as if God were absent, she learned that he was watching over her. Her soul sang. She was the only person, male or female, in the Old Testament who conferred a name on God. She also obeyed God, traveling all the way back through Kadesh-bernea to Beersheba to Abram's tents in Mamre. And there she submitted to Sarai. The sense here is that she believed God and remained a child of grace, dwelling in the tents of Shem"

7. What causes you to lose sight of the grace of God in your life? How can we maintain our focus on God's grace when life is difficult? What about when life is good?

Our tendency is to just focus on what is happening in our lives right at the current moment and forget all the moments of the grace of God in our life previously. Kent Hughes gave us a good suggestion for maintaining that focus on God's grace when life is difficult and good:

“Christian, are you contemplating an expediency to obtain what you imagine to be God’s will in your most treasured relationship-in a friendship-in a professional pursuit-in your career-in your education-in your ministry? If so, take a deep breath. Stand back. Take some time. Read God’s Word. Think. Pray. And obey the revealed will of God.”

8. How does being reminded that God is “the God who sees” impact the way you live today? Can you describe a time when you were comforted by knowing God sees you?

When we know that God sees us it changes the way we understand and respond to the situations in our life. And when we remember that He is a good God who is all powerful then we know that whatever has come into our life is under His control and He has a purpose for our good and for His Glory.

The verses below are a good encouragement on this idea:

Romans 8:38-39 (NIV)

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^[a] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Philippians 1:4-6 (NIV)

⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶ in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.^[a]

Conclusion

Faith demands that we believe some incredible things on a daily basis. We believe that God speaks to us through His Word. We believe He sent His Son to restore our relationship with Him. We believe that same Son got up and walked out of a tomb after He had been dead for three days. We believe that the rewards of a faithful life include eternity in paradise and

unbroken fellowship with God. We believe that God performs miracles, even today. We believe that God cares about the details of our lives, and perhaps most astonishingly, we believe that God Almighty loves us, in spite of our sinfulness. As a result, God expects us to trust Him and rest in His promises.

PRAYER

Thank God for His unmerited love and kindness. Pray that He would help us let go of our jealousy by remembering His promises and savoring His grace. Thank God for seeing, knowing, and watching over each and every person. Ask Him to strengthen and encourage you with the knowledge of His sovereignty over your circumstances that you might obey Him and glorify Him



FURTHER STUDY



Galatians 6:7-8 (NIV)

⁷ Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. ⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Proverbs 30:21-23 (NIV)

²¹ “Under three things the earth trembles,
under four it cannot bear up:
²² a servant who becomes king,
a godless fool who gets plenty to eat,
²³ a contemptible woman who gets married,
and a servant who displaces her mistress.

Additional Resources

Devotionals-

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/god-seeing/>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/lord-has-listened/>

Articles –

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/jared-c-wilson/when-you-feel-forgotten-abandoned-and-unloved/>

Sermon-

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/hagar-and-slavery-vs-sarah-and-freedom>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/battling-the-unbelief-of-impatience>