

GROUP DISCUSSION SERMON OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

In today's passage our hero goes off the rails. We're going to read a bizarre story today, highlighting Abraham's foolishness. It's disappointing to see the trouble caused by foolish decisions, but the story has some great application and is a great reminder that God can use any person who has faith.

I. GENESIS 16

A. SARAH AND ABRAHAM CRAFT A FOOLISH PLAN

1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar;

2a so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her."

This was the common method of "fertility treatment." They didn't know about invitro fertilization or artificial insemination. So you would find a surrogate mother, the husband would impregnate her, and the child would legally belong to the first wife. It allowed for the husband to still have children if his wife was barren.

SIDE ROAD: WHAT SHOULD THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE BE REGARDING FERTILITY TREATMENTS?

* In vitro fertilization: Every fertilized egg is a human being and should be treated like one. (Purposely aborting an embryo is murder.) For this procedure to be morally acceptable, all fertilized eggs would need to be immediately implanted into the mother's womb. Since most doctors refuse to implant all fertilized eggs into the mother's womb, in vitro fertilization is not usually a viable option for the Christian. Even if a doctor agrees to implant all fertilized eggs, you are trusting a medical professional who may not share your values. It is difficult to monitor whether they carry out this important direction. Some Christian ethicists have also raised concerns about separating conception from the marital act. While the Bible doesn't say it's a sin to create a "test tube baby," is it wise?

* Artificial insemination: Artificial insemination is not morally wrong if using the husband's sperm. However, since medical professionals have on rare occasions abused or misused this procedure, we need to wisely consider the risks of trusting this procedure to any other human being. Christian ethicists have raised the same concerns here about separating conception from the marital act.

* Surrogate mothers: When a husband's sperm and wife's egg are implanted in the womb of a surrogate mother, it may be difficult to categorically declare this an immoral act. Where's the sin? However, many Christian experts are concluding that purposely bringing a human being into the world through a surrogate mother is unwise. It requires the baby to endure unnatural separation from its birth mother and causes the surrogate mother to endure emotional trauma when separated from the child she has been nurturing. It is also unwise for us to encourage young women to profit from birthing children they will never raise. When using the husband's sperm and the surrogate's egg, it is an even greater step away from God's design.

* Fertility drugs. As Christians we believe we have the biblical right to take medication to bring healing to the body. Generally speaking, there is nothing wrong with taking a medication to help a husband and wife conceive a child. However, we should wisely consider the potential side effects and proceed with caution, especially since some drugs can have a potential effect on the child as well as the parent.

Whether or not you've followed this advice in the past, turn over all your future decisions to God today. Trust God's grace and remember that God can redeem anything.

If you are dealing with infertility and would like Kellie and me to pray for you, please email me and let me know your story. Also, if you have specific questions about fertility treatments, we will do our best to answer them. Email rusty@ndcchurch.com.

BACK TO OUR TEXT:

Sarah was distraught after yrs of not conceiving. She knew God had promised Abraham children, and she was too old. She said, "Let's just do what everybody else does & get a surrogate."

Hagar is a young Egyptian, probably about twenty years old. She's the right childbearing age. In their culture this was acceptable behavior, but from our vantagepoint we can see this is not going to end well.

This is the first of several mistakes Abraham and Sarah make.

MISTAKE #1: Sarah crafted a sinful plan that was culturally acceptable.

Consider some modern-day examples of crafting a sinful plan that is culturally acceptable...

16:2b Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

MISTAKE #2: Abraham agreed to his wife's foolish advice.

3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. 4a He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

B. THE PREGNANT HAGAR IS MISTREATED AND FLEES

4b When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.

I'm sure the ladies could tell us why Hagar now looks down on Sarah.

This all sounds like typical stepfamily drama today!

5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

MISTAKE #3: Sarah blamed others for her problems.

It's our nature to want to excuse our behavior and find someone to blame. Abraham should shepherd her through this. Instead... (Notice in this next verse how he refers to his new wife. Is Hagar the mother of his first child, or is she still a slave?)

6a "Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best."

MISTAKE #4: Abraham refused to take responsibility.

6b Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

MISTAKE #5: Sarah mistreated her scapegoat.

She didn't just blame others for a problem she created, she turned her guilt into misplaced anger and took it out on Hagar.

C. GOD APPEARS TO HAGAR AT THE SPRING IN THE DESERT

Hagar, a young, pregnant slave woman, runs away into a very hostile world. She makes it halfway to Egypt and stops at a spring in the desert. She's suffering and alone and thinks nobody cares about her.

7 The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur.

Remember this is a runaway Egyptian slave. Yet in her loneliest, neediest time, God appears to her.

8 And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

"I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. 9 Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her."

That's not what she expected God to tell her. But despite the flaws in Abraham's family, it was the safest place for her child, and it was where the child could learn about God.

10 The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count." 11 The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now pregnant and you will give birth to a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. 12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

To this day that prophecy continues to play out as true.

13 She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."

"The God who sees me" is El-Roi, one of the most beautiful names given to God in all the Bible. It's given to him by an Egyptian slave girl who was on the run. In fact for centuries they called that spring and the well connected to it "Beer Lahai Roi" meaning "The well of the living One who sees."

D. HAGAR RETURNS AND GIVES BIRTH TO ISHMAEL

Hagar returned to a tough life, because she knew it was the right thing to do.

15 So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Notice Abraham and Sarah took her back. And clearly Abraham believed Hagar's story, because Abraham is the one who named the child Ishmael just as the angel commanded Hagar.

II. GENESIS 17

Abraham figures this must be God's plan, even though it was awkward. For the next thirteen years, God is silent. Ishmael is growing up. Abraham figures Ishmael must be the son of the promise.

But then chapter 17 tells us that thirteen years later God appears to Abraham. God reiterates the entire covenant promise, even after the Hagar debacle!

1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. 2 Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

Summarizing Chapter 17:

God says:

- Abram, I am God Almighty, El Shaddai, the most powerful one.
- Walk before me faithfully and be blameless.
- From now on I'm going to call you Abraham instead of Abram. (Abram means "exalted father"; Abraham means "father of nations.")
- Just like I promised, nations and kings will come from you.
- And I'm going to give you the land I promised you way back.
- I'm also changing Sarai's name to Sarah.
- She will be the mother of nations; kings will come from her.

Abraham laughs at God! (Not a good idea.) He says, "Will Sarah bear a child at the age of 90? May Ishmael be blessed!"

God says, "I'll bless Ishmael, but Sarah will give birth. In fact, name the baby Isaac, which means He Laughs, since you laughed. The everlasting covenant will be established through Isaac."

In the middle of this speech, God commands Abraham to start a new tradition with every male in his family, to be continued on for every future generation. As a sign that he and his family trust in the one true God and are a separate people, every male in Abraham's household is to be circumcised.

This is a dramatic reminder to Abraham and all his descendants: God is in control of reproduction. You're not to be using the sexual organ for your own pleasure, surrogates, or whatever. Your seed and the organ that produces it are to be dedicated to God.

From that day forward every Jewish male has been circumcised.

We'll see that God will use the seed of Abraham to bring about the Messiah, not through Hagar but through Sarah.

III. APPLICATION

These stories are preserved for us for two reasons:

1) A primary (or "upper") reason: To explain the history of our religion and how God used imperfect people to bring about the Messiah.

2) A secondary (or “lower”) reason: These people of faith are to serve as an example to us. Often we discuss their heroics. But sometimes, like in today’s passage, we learn from their poor decisions or bad examples.

Where would you put yourself in this story? With whom do you identify?

- Do you resonate with Hagar, the manipulated and abused servant?
- Do you connect with Sarah in the beginning of our story, tired of waiting on God, maybe tempted to force your own foolish solutions?
- Do you relate to Abraham? Did you also wake up one day and realize you’re leading a dysfunctional family created by your sinful decisions?

Let’s learn some lessons.

A. The lesson from Hagar: Are you suffering from the sins of others? Remember: God sees you, even when his people do not. Follow him.

Satan will show you the faults of believers so you’ll reject what they believe.

God exists and is good regardless of the behavior of his followers.

Therefore: Don’t foolishly throw out the truth because of a bad example. Follow God. He loves you, he sees you, and he can redeem it all.

B. The lesson from Sarah: Are you considering a foolish decision? Remember: Sin has terrible consequences. Wait on him.

If you are waiting on God: Be aware of your vulnerability. Be patient.

C. The lesson from Abraham: Has your sin created chaos? Remember: God loves to use broken people. Walk with him.

Satan will tell you it’s too late for you. He’ll say that you’ve lost credibility, there’s no hope for you, you’re destined for loneliness and heartache.

The truth is, you may suffer consequences for this lifetime. But God has a track record of using broken people and redeeming it all. Do you believe in his ability to use even you and give you love, joy and peace? If so, start today to repair it all with one important step: Walk with him. Trust God can redeem it all and wants to do so in your life.

INVITATION

God would love to put another grace trophy on his mantle with your picture. The further you’ve run from God, the bigger the trophy, if you’ll come home. The old proverb says, “No matter how far you’ve traveled down the wrong road, turn back.” He is El Roi, the God who sees. He sees you. He loves you. He created you.

We’ve all run from him. But despite your sin, he offers you his grace through his son Jesus.

Note: The New Testament explains that baptism is the new circumcision. Be baptized today!

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Trap of "Culturally Acceptable" Sin

Genesis 16:1–2a (NIV) *"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, 'The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.'"*

- **Discussion Question:** Sarai's plan was standard practice in her culture, but it went against God's best for her family. What are some modern shortcuts or behaviors that our culture considers completely normal, but actually lead us away from trusting God? How can we spot the difference when everyone around us is doing it?

2. Navigating the Pain of Waiting

Genesis 16:2b–3 (NIV) *"Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife."*

- **Discussion Question:** Sarai turned to her own strategy after ten long years of waiting. When you find yourself in a season where God's promises or answers feel delayed, what makes it so tempting to take matters into your own hands? What practices help you stay patient and trust Him in the quiet waiting periods?

3. Breaking the Blame Game

Genesis 16:5–6a (NIV) *"Then Sarai said to Abram, 'You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me.' 'Your slave is in your hands,' Abram said. 'Do with her whatever you think best.'"*

- **Discussion Question:** When Sarai's plan backfired, she blamed Abram, and Abram dodged leadership by refusing to step up. Why is it our natural instinct to shift blame or passively-aggressively avoid responsibility when choices go wrong? How can a group like ours better support one another in taking healthy ownership of our mistakes?

4. Finding Comfort in *El Roi*

Genesis 16:7, 13 (NIV) *"The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur... She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me,' for she said, 'I have now seen the One who sees me.'"*

- **Discussion Question:** Hagar felt used, abandoned, and isolated in the desert, yet God met her right where she was. Can you share a time in your life when you felt overlooked or hurt by others, but realized God truly saw you? How does knowing God as *El Roi* ("the God who sees me") change how you navigate lonely or hurtful circumstances?

5. Overcoming Spiritual Disillusionment

Genesis 16:9, 13 (NIV) *"Then the angel of the LORD told her, 'Go back to your mistress and submit to her.' ... She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: 'You are the God who sees me...'"*

- **Discussion Question:** Hagar was mistreated by the very family that was supposed to represent God. It's easy to walk away from faith altogether when religious or faithful people let us down. How can we keep our focus on God's goodness and character when Christians or church leaders behave poorly or make painful mistakes?

6. Embracing God's Power to Redeem

Genesis 17:1–2 (NIV) *"When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.'"*

- **Discussion Question:** Even after 13 years of silence following a massive mistake, God reaffirmed His covenant with Abram and called Himself *El Shaddai* (God Almighty). How does Abram's story give you hope when you feel like your past mistakes or family chaos have disqualified you from being used by God? What is one practical step you can take this week to "walk before Him" starting right where you are?