



November 17, 2013



The God Who Sees

A Grow-Pray-Study guide for small groups

This guide uses the Scripture readings from the daily "GPS" study guide. Group members may read the daily readings before the group meeting, or read the verses aloud when the group meets.

The group may subdivide into two or three smaller groups, each discussing a set of the daily

readings and the matching questions on page 2, or the entire group may discuss those questions together. We pray that, whatever pattern of study you choose, the Holy Spirit will weave God's Word into the life and heart of each group member.

MONDAY

Psalm 118:1-9

This psalm was part of a hymn collection rooted in God's action at the time of the Exodus to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt. Its message fits perfectly with the story we'll study this week: the story of Hagar, an Egyptian slave girl who twice found herself cast off and alone in the wilderness. Her story, like Psalm 118, said we are never abandoned, because God is always with us.

TUESDAY

Genesis 16:1-6

Sarai and Abram had waited ten years for God to fulfill the promise that they would have a son. Sarai gave Abram her servant Hagar as a "wife" (verse 3), but a secondary one, a common practice in their culture. After Hagar got pregnant, she too lived out their culture's values, seeing her ability to become pregnant as a sign of superiority to her barren mistress.

WEDNESDAY

Genesis 16:7-15

Hagar's lack of respect angered Sarai, who treated her harshly. Hagar, probably young and inexperienced, fled from Sarai's abuse into the desert—a harsh and desolate landscape, in which a pregnant woman alone was unlikely to survive. But God's messenger met her in the desert, and gave her the same promise God gave Abram: so many descendants "they can't be counted!" (verse 10). Hagar was amazed that God saw and cared about her.

THURSDAY

Genesis 21:1-11

In God's own time, the promise of a son for Abraham and Sarah (God changed their names; cf. Genesis 17) became reality. They named their son Isaac (Hebrew "laughter"). When they celebrated his weaning, Sarah saw Ishmael laugh. She demanded that Abraham evict Hagar and Ishmael, so that there could not be any doubt that Isaac was Abraham's promised heir.

FRIDAY

**Genesis 21:12-21,
25:8-9**

Abraham was sad to send Hagar and Ishmael away, and tried to give them a few provisions. But bread and water could hardly keep them safe in the desert. Hagar was again cast off and abandoned, but again God did not let her and Ishmael perish. God heard their cries for help, and showed Hagar a well of life-giving water. Ishmael and Isaac went their own ways, but not in hatred or hostility. In the end, they reunited to bury their father Abraham.

SATURDAY

Hebrews 13:5-8

We mean well when we tell a child or a lover, "I will always be there for you." But we cannot guarantee that promise on this earth. Our mortality, if not our changeability, tells us that. Only God can actually promise to always be there for us—and God makes that promise. The writer of Hebrews quoted Psalm 118, and alluded to the Genesis stories of God's faithful care for God's people, to tell all God's children that we can trust that God will never, ever abandon us.

To access the Family Activity suggested in this week's GPS, download the printable GPS from www.cor.org/guide.



SUGGESTED PRAYER

Lord Jesus, teach us day by day how to more firmly anchor all our hopes and dreams in you. Help us to trust that you will protect and provide. Help us to trust in your wisdom and guidance even in the most difficult situations when we feel lost. Nourish our souls with the wonder and glory of the truth that we have you, and that your presence will never leave us. Amen.

CONNECT (5-10 minute discussion, at most)

When you need to get away from life's ravages and find some peace and quiet, where do you like to go? What do you like to do?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND STUDY

- Read **Psalm 118:1-9**. To you, what is this Psalm's central message? Why did you answer as you did? How vital is it that we remember that God is always with us? Why? How crucial is it that we believe that God's love for us endures forever? Why? Do you really believe these statements? What tends to remind you of God's love in your daily life? Verse 6 said, "The Lord is for me [or "with me"]—I won't be afraid." What bad things in your life has God's presence helped you outlast?
- Read **Genesis 16:1-6**. What would you say about Sarai blaming Abram for her problems? Why do we sometimes tend to blame others for the results of our own actions? How does this affect our relationships? Do we ever overlook the decisions we've made that resulted in some problems in our lives? How do people learn to take responsibility for the decisions they make? Is Hagar at all responsible for the situation she found herself in? Did Abram do anything to contribute to this conflict? How can hearing this story of Sarai, Hagar and Abram affect your life and attitudes?
- Read **Genesis 16:7-15**. God saw and felt Hagar's pain and sent his messenger to her. Has God ever sent a "messenger" into your life? Do you believe that God is able to see within you and feel what you are feeling? Does this belief help you to endure things in your life that require endurance? Hagar was a member of a culture that was (and is) often hostile to the Israelites. But God showed in this story that he loved and had mercy for Hagar as well. What does this say about the breadth of God's love and how we should feel about people of different cultures and beliefs?
- Read **Genesis 21:1-11**. Abraham and Sarah had to wait a long time for God's promise to be fulfilled. Sometimes in the Bible, God's promises weren't even fulfilled within an earthly lifetime. When have you had to wait longer than you wished for a prayer to be answered? Are there things you are still waiting for? What helps you hold onto trust as you wait? Why did Abraham and Sarah have different emotions toward Hagar and Ishmael? When have you faced a situation, in family, friendship or workplace, in which loyalties and emotions conflicted? Did God's principles help you to sort things out?
- Read **Genesis 21:12-21, 25:8-9**. Although Abraham reluctantly sent Hagar and Ishmael away, Ishmael returned to help bury Abraham. What does this say about the relationship between Abraham and Ishmael? God heard the cries of Ishmael in the desert. Can you count on God to hear your cries? Have you ever had a sense that God was hearing your cries? God "opened her eyes" so Hagar could find water. Has God ever opened your eyes to something you needed to see?
- Read **Hebrews 13:5-8** and the paragraph under "Saturday", above. What experiences and insights have helped you to place your ultimate trust, not in any human leader or institution, but in Jesus? How have you found your trust in Jesus to be a source of "hope, which is a safe and secure anchor for our whole being" (Hebrews 6:19)?

From last week: Did you pray daily that you might make the right choices in your daily life? Did you make your choices more consciously and deliberately? Did you ask God to guide you and give you the strength to make the right and wisest choices? Did you feel any change in your usual decision making during the week?



FOR ADDITIONAL INSIGHT

From Pastor Adam Hamilton's sermon, November 17, 2013:

The text calls Hagar a wife to Abraham, as we see in verse 3, but she is a secondary or subordinate wife—she is still Sarah's servant girl. Once Hagar conceives, she begins to act differently towards Sarah, or at least Sarah imagines this is so, and Sarah begins to treat Hagar harshly. She is bearing the child for her husband that Sarah never could. The word here for how Sarah treated her Egyptian slave girl is the same word used for how the Egyptians would later harshly treat the Israelite slaves.

Abraham, rather than intervening, allows Sarah to mistreat Hagar, and Hagar, the young Egyptian slave, pregnant with the 86-year-old Abraham's child, finally runs away. She runs towards Egypt, her homeland....

I love this. Hagar gives God a name. She is the first person in all of the Bible to give God a name, saying, "You are *El-roi*." *El* is short for *Elohim*, the standard word used for God throughout the Ancient Near East. And *Roi* means "to see." "I will call you The God who Sees." She realized that God had seen her in her suffering, and that God was always watching her. Notice God did not deliver Hagar. He did not change Sarah, and make the situation all better instantly. But now Hagar knew that God saw her and heard her, and with that knowledge she could face what lay ahead. God had given her a promise, that through her son Ishmael (a name that means "God hears") she will have descendants too numerous to count. She has a great future she cannot see....

One day, after Isaac is born, Sarah sees Ishmael playing with him, and she becomes angry, and she tells Abraham: "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." This was very distressing to Abraham, but God told him not to worry—he would take care of Ishmael. So Abraham tells Hagar she has to leave. Abraham divorces Hagar, and sends her away to return to Egypt, but with only enough supplies to make it to the first inn on the way. This is the Bible's first divorce. Hagar is treated unfairly. Abraham, the patriarch of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, acts dishonorably....

Many of you have known the wilderness of divorce. Or perhaps it was not divorce, but rejection by a girlfriend or boyfriend who broke your heart, parents or children who rejected you. I imagine Hagar crying out to God to stop this. I imagine her saying, "Where are you now? You who see? Where are you now, you who hear?"

Rejection is a part of life, and when we're rejected and hurt we may feel like this is the end. It may often look like this is the end. But Hagar's story doesn't end in the wilderness. Remember Ishmael means "God hears," and once more, in her wilderness when things seemed most bleak, God heard, God saw, and God sent a messenger. God provided just what she needed when she needed it—water. He reiterates the promise: you are going to survive this, Hagar! Your son too!...

Ishmael's descendants today are known as the Arabs—Saudis, Palestinians, Yemenis, Arab-Egyptians and a host of other Arab people groups. The fact that God speaks kindly of Ishmael, and that God has plans to make him a great nation, tells me that God still cares about the Arab people. About 10% of them are Christians, the vast majority are Muslims. But they are still children of the promise God made to Hagar. He cares for them....

I was 11 or 12 when my parents divorced. It was frightening. A year later my mom remarried. Four years later my step-dad left. The house we were living in was foreclosed on. We moved to an abandoned farmhouse with no furnace and windows knocked out, just north of 157th and Metcalf. Our church family came the weekend before we moved in and put new glass in the windows, put a wood burning stove in the house, and helped us move. I'll never forget my mom's courage in doing whatever it took to keep our family going. Nor will I forget when Jesus sent his angels to care for us—the people in our congregation who helped....

I want to end by saying this to any of you who are divorced or rejected: we want to be your church. Some churches inadvertently make divorced people feel like they don't belong. I'm telling you, we want you, value you, and would love for you to call us your church family. We offer Divorce Care Recovery on Thursday nights, separate groups for men and women, where you can find healing and hope—we even offer childcare for these groups....For those who've been rejected, as God sought Hagar out, twice, in the wilderness, and as God saw her, heard her and sent messengers to help her, so in your moments of rejection God seeks you out, sees you, hears you and will send you messengers. You are his child, he loves you, and you have great value to him.

Hagar

Hagar in the Hebrew Bible and Judaism: Though Hagar appears only in the book of Genesis, she plays an important role as Sarah's slave and the mother of Abraham's firstborn son Ishmael. The Sarah and Hagar saga "forces a choice between two central principles: reverence for their Jewish ancestors, through whom God creates the nation of Israel, and concern for the powerless, which is enshrined in biblical and subsequent Jewish law" (Reinhartz and Walfish, "Conflict and Coexistence," 102):



- Josephus defends the idea that God told Hagar to return to Sarah, after she suffered abuse at her hands, by claiming that such a return would teach Hagar self-control. He speaks favorably of the salvation Hagar receives in the desert once she is driven out with Ishmael in Gen 21 (Josephus, *Ant.*, I.10.4; I.12.3)....
- Later rabbinic sources question whether Hagar was a daughter of Pharaoh, given to Abraham after he tricked Pharaoh into thinking Sarah was his sister....Rabbis also question Sarah's mistreatment of Hagar (Reinhartz and Walfish, "Conflict and Coexistence," 105–12)....

Hagar is the only woman in the Hebrew Bible to encounter the divine. She receives a promise of blessing that could be seen as equivalent to Abraham's promise of numerous offspring (see Gen 16:10; Spitzer, " 'Where Do you Come From,'" 9–10).

Hagar in the New Testament and Christianity: Hagar represents the line of Abraham that does not remain within Judaism....In Galatians 4:21–31, Paul compares Hagar, who he calls the mother of the child of the flesh, and Sarah, who he calls the mother of the child of promise. Paul's audience in Galatia understands themselves as descendants of Sarah....

- By the third century, "Hagar" was a code for "synagogue" (Trible and Russell, "Unto the Thousandth," 8).
- Luther says that Paul "squelched the proud Jews" through his use of Hagar (Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle vv. 22, 23*)....
- In Galatians, Sarah and Hagar become two types of doctrine—legal and evangelical (Calvin, *Commentary on Galatians*, v. 24).

Influenced by cultural perspectives, the treatment of Hagar in the Bible is often questioned....Hagar's struggle is alive today—"The low-born, hard-working domestic laborer, used and misused and cast out by her employers, the single mother abandoned by the father of her child, the foreigner and refugee far from her native land, desperately trying to survive, frantic in her maternal concern for the safety of her child—this Hagar I have met many times" (Michel, "Hagar," 99).

Hagar in Islam: Though Hagar does not appear in the *Qu'ran*, she is important in the traditions (*hadith*) as the mother of Ishmael (Sahih Al-Bukhari 4:372–76) and the matriarch of the Abrahamic descendants who founded Islam. Later generations of Muslims developed the idea that Ishmael was the beginning of the Arabs. Islam believes Hagar to be... "the matriarch of monotheism" (Trible, "Unto the Thousandth," 9–10). Her name is frequently linked with *hajara*, which means "true faith," or *hijara*, signifying the journey she made to the Arabian Peninsula (Trible, "Unto the Thousandth," 10)....Islam tradition also holds that her tomb is near the Ka'bah, where Ishmael was later buried; her tomb is one of the holy places of Islam (Trible, "Unto the Thousandth," 10). (from the *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, John D. Barry and Lazarus Wentz, ed.)

Ishmael (Heb. yišmā'ēl, 'God hears').

The son of Abraham by Hagar the Egyptian handmaid of Sarah. When Sarah realized that she was barren, she gave her handmaid to Abraham to conceive seed for her (Gn. 16:2). An example of this ancient custom has been discovered in the *Nuzi tablets (ANET, p. 220). After conceiving by Abraham, Hagar began to despise Sarah, who then drove her out of the home with Abraham's reluctant consent. On her way to Egypt she was met by the angel of Yahweh, who told her to return and submit to Sarah. He also gave her the promise of a multiplied seed through her son Ishmael, who would be 'a wild ass of a man' (16:12; cf. Jb. 39:5–8)....When Ishmael was about 16, a great celebration was held at the weaning of the child Isaac (21:8). Ishmael gave vent to his jealousy of 'the child of the promise' (Rom. 9:7–9) by 'mocking' him. The apostle Paul employs the verb 'persecuted' (ediōke) to describe this act (Gal. 4:29) and builds upon it an extended allegory of the opposition of legalistic religionists to those 'born according to the Spirit' (Gal. 4:21–31). Sarah insisted that both Ishmael and Hagar be expelled from the home, and Abraham consented only after the Lord revealed to him that 'through Isaac shall your descendants be named' (Gn. 21:12). Hagar and her son nearly perished from thirst in the desert of Beersheba, until the angel of Yahweh pointed her to a well of water in response to Ishmael's cry. He grew to be an archer, married an Egyptian and fathered twelve princes (25:12–16). Esau married one of his daughters (28:9; 36:3, 10). He joined Isaac in the burial of their father and died at the age of 137 (25:9, 17). (From the *New Bible Dictionary*, J. D. Douglas, N. Hillyer and D. R. W. Wood, editors)

Final application:

This week, focus on taking responsibility for your own actions. Pray daily that you might be given the vision to recognize when your actions might result in negative consequences, for you or others. Seek ways to repair any damaged relationships that might have resulted and review last weeks' application about better choices. Next week, let the group know how you felt about this process.