

THE GOD WHO PROMISES

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM
GENESIS 12-22

The God who Sees and Hears - Genesis 15

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Leaders, please use these questions as a guide for discussion. Please don't feel like you have to go through every one!)

Connect: How can the assurance of God's salvation encourage you this week?

Warm-Up

1. Can you think of a time when impatience led to a poor decision? What happened?

Read Genesis 16:1-6

2. In verse 2, how does Sarai describe God's role in her situation? What does this reveal about her perspective?
3. How do Abram and Sarai respond to God's delayed timing?
4. What consequences flow from Abram and Sarai's decision? List the ways relationships break down in verses 4-6.
5. How does this chapter show that sin rarely affects only the people making the decision?

Read Genesis 16:7-16

6. Who is Hagar in this story? How has she been treated by those around her?
7. What stands out about the fact that the Angel of the Lord appears to Hagar?
8. Why is it significant that God addresses Hagar by name?
9. What does God's interaction with Hagar teach us about his character?
10. What do the names "Ishmael" ("God hears") and "the God who sees me" reveal about God's relationship with the vulnerable and afflicted?
11. Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly shows concern for the lowly, oppressed, and overlooked. What other biblical examples can you think of?
12. Read Luke 1:46-55. How does this passage show God's heart for the humble, weary, and broken-hearted?
13. Jesus experienced rejection, suffering, and injustice. How does this help us trust him with our own pain and struggles? How has Jesus shown the ultimate compassion to us?
14. Where in your life are you currently struggling to trust God's timing?
15. Who in your community might feel unseen or overlooked? How could you reflect God's compassion toward them this week?
16. Is there a burden, anxiety, disappointment, or injustice that you need to bring before the God who sees and hears?

Apply: How does knowing that God sees, hears, and cares for you challenge the way you respond to waiting, suffering, disappointment, or uncertainty in your life?

PRAY: *Heavenly Father, thank you that you are the God who sees and hears us. Forgive us for the times we fail to trust your timing and take matters into our own hands. Help us rest in your promises, cast our cares upon you, and show your compassion to those who feel overlooked and hurting. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

TITLE: The God who Sees

PASSAGE: Genesis 16

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: God is the God of compassion who sees and redeems the broken hearted.

AIM: For people to have assurance in the promises of God

STRUCTURE:

- Human Impatience and Chaos - 1-6
- God's Compassion: 7-16

- In school, the two words that probably made me outwardly groan the most were the words 'Group Assignment'
- I don't know if you've had this group assignment experience before either in school or in the workplace on a project...
- You come up with a plan as a group to execute the assignment...
 - You agree on an order of operations, you assign tasks, you all think it's great! You love the plan. All things going well, the project will be finished on time and on budget.
- But that's until someone in the group decides to change things up.
- They might be well intentioned...but they go ahead, alter the plan, and try and do other people's tasks for them!
- But instead of things working out for the better - it usually ends up in chaos, frustration, delays, and budget blowouts...
- If you've been on teams but this hasn't happened to you, you're either lucky or, sorry to say, maybe you're the one going ahead causing confusion!
- I know that I have been that person sometimes... and I do apologise if you've been on the receiving end of it!

- But Abram and God last week have come up with a plan!
- Or more accurately, God has made a plan, and promised it to Abram.
- We saw that God was the one who made a covenant with Abram - he is the promise maker! And Abram was only a passive recipient to the covenant. While it was being made, remember what Abram was doing? He was asleep!
- But Abram believed God, trusted in his plan and promises. And we ended last week on such a high.
- All Abram and Sarai had to do was wait for God to execute the plan and come through on his promises.
- But the great old human fault of impatience creeps in for them.
- By this point, they had been in the land of Canaan for 10 years. Sarai was at least around 85 - but still no son has been born to them.
- 10 years since those first promises were made! But no son from God.
- And so instead of continuing to wait, they come to take measures into their own hands. They disregard God and they don't care who they use or abuse in order to make these things come about.
- But what we'll see is that despite human impatience and chaos, God is the one who sees and knows. He is the one who sees and knows the lowly, the outcast, the broken hearted, and redeems them.

- **Human Impatience and Chaos**
- Genesis 16:1-3 "Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife."
- If you remember back a couple of weeks ago, Abram and Sarai left Egypt with goods and servants. Hagar is one of those servants.
- And Sarai lays out the problem - but with a twist on the truth.

- She says that God has prevented her from bearing children.
- She's saying that God is keeping her from having children, God has closed her womb!
- There are these promises that God has made, but she thinks that God is actively working against them and she's blaming God!

- Last week, Abram cried out to God because of this problem; this week Sarai doesn't consult God, or question God, but goes straight to blaming God.
- Now the fact of the matter is that at this point, yes, Sarai hadn't born any children yet because God hasn't made it happen just yet.
- But at the same time, he did promise that there would be a time when Abram would have a child!
- So do you notice the impatience here...the distrust in God..

- And so this distrust leads to her taking the matters into her own hands.
- She gets her husband to marry Hagar (the Egyptian slave), sleep with her, so that she might be able to have a child in that way.
- This is like history repeating itself in a mirror:
 - Abram didn't trust God and so lied about Sarai in Egypt, selling her into Pharaoh's harem;
 - Sarai didn't trust God and so got Abram to sleep with Hagar.
- This practise seems to be common in the Ancient culture of the day.
 - Not being able to bear a child would have brought shame onto the woman, and so to preserve the family line the husband would marry the maidservant in order to have a child.
- And so this is what Sarai does - and Abram passively agrees to it.
- This language of taking and giving might be familiar to us. It's reminiscent of the language used of Eve at the fall.
 - Eve took the fruit, gave it to Adam, and he ate
 - Sarai took her servant, gave it to Abram, and he slept with her.
- Sometimes verses like this have been interpreted to say that the only sinners here were the wives so husbands shouldn't listen to their wives...
 - But if anything Adam and Abram here are more culpable! Because they received the instructions and the promise and the plan and didn't stop Eve or Sarai from messing it up!
- This also brings up the question of polygamy, the practice of husbands having multiple wives..
 - You might have noticed that this isn't condemned - or called out by God...But on the flip side it's not approved nor commended or celebrated...
 - The ideal for marriage has already been laid out to be a one-flesh union between a husband and his wife in the creation narrative.
 - So this is far from ideal...
 - We should be left with the feeling that something's not quite right here
- When people go ahead of God's promises, and disregard him, and are impatient with him...it leads to all kinds of mess

- And it's about to get even messier...
- V4 "And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her."
- Hagar fell pregnant, and when she did, she began to look down on Sarai!
 - You can easily see how that happens can't you?
 - *I'm the wife that can actually bear children - nanannaa*
- And so Sarai goes to Abram and blames him for everything - hang on, wasn't it Sarai's original idea?
- So Abram says - she's your servant do what you want with her - hang on Abram buddy, Hagar is actually your wife carrying your child!
- And so Sarai treats her servant so harshly, that she runs away.
- What. A. Mess.
- I mean - this has more drama than an episode of Married at First sight! (At least I think...)

- But this is what going ahead of God can do!
- I wonder if you've made a big decision in life, be it in your career, or relationships, or finances, or housing - and not consulted God first?
- Sometimes when we go ahead of God, it can just feel forced and unwise - because it is unwise! It can leave us in a tangled mess sometimes.
- A lack of prayer or consulting with God in our lives is probably an expression or sign of our lack of trust in God!

- Let that not be here with us!
- **God's Compassion**
- But back to the story - I wonder if you noticed who hasn't had a word yet...who hasn't had a voice...who hasn't even been named by Abram and Sarai?
- Hagar!
- They don't refer to her by her name, but instead they call her 'the servant'!
- She gets traded like a commodity, and labelled like a commodity, not a person or image bearer of God.
- But not with God
 - V7 "The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, "Hagar.."
- The angel of the LORD represents God himself. The presence of God.
 - In Exodus when Moses encounters God in the burning bush - it's described as the angel of the Lord appearing.
- And this appearance in Genesis is the first mention of the Angel of the Lord.
- And the angel first appears to who? Not to Noah, not even to Abram.. but to a
 - A mistreated, Egyptian Slave-Girl.
 - To Hagar - and he calls her by name.
- Can you see the tenderness here? The compassion of God?
- And that's not even where it stops
 - V8 "And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.""
 - *Now this section has been used as a proof-text to suggest that people shouldn't leave abusive situations - but we need to remember that this is a particular event at a particular time. We always need to read the verses in context!*
- But the command comes with an amazing promise.
- That this son that she has that will be born from the chaos of human sinfulness and impatience will still be blessed.
- After all, he will still be a son of Abram!
- And the angel tells Hagar to call her son Ishmael because (end of V11) the Lord has listened to your affliction.
- And you'll see in the notes at the bottom of the page that Ishmael means "God Hears"
- But it won't be all smooth sailing.
- His nation will be in conflict with others. It describes Ishmael as being a wild donkey - he'll be a nomadic type nation as well
- And here's Hagar's Response
- V13: "So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered."
- Abram didn't call on the name of the Lord, Sarai didn't - but the Egyptian servant Hagar did.
- And there is only one person in the Old Testament who gives God a name - and that is Hagar!
- "You are a God of seeing" and the well was called Beer-lahai-roi which means "The well of the living one who sees me"
- And eventually Hagar gave birth and Abram called him the name Ishmael.

THE GOD WHO LISTENS AND SEES

- Who is it in this story that God both listens to and sees?
- It's not Abram - he doesn't consult God.
- It's not Sarai - she doesn't either...she's too busy working out her own plan...
- God listens to and sees Hagar. The vulnerable, downtrodden, mistreated, traded, Hagar.
- In the midst of human sinfulness and chaos and impatience, God has compassion on the broken-hearted Hagar!
- If you think about it from her perspective, she's been forced into marriage and the bed of Abram (being a servant, she wouldn't have had a say in the matter), she's fallen pregnant to him, then mistreated by his first

wife and treated again as a slave and not as a wife, and then had to flee back to her home country where who knows would have happened to her!

- But God hears her cry...sees her situation, and still blesses her.
- This is what God does! Particularly to women in the Old Testament who were, sadly, treated as commodities.

- And it's not just to Hagar, but we can think of Rahab the prostitute who lived in the city walls...who lived a poor and sinful life, had faith in God but God heard and saw her...
- We can think of poor destitute Ruth whose husband died and so she had no real hope! But was redeemed by faithful Boaz...God heard and saw her...
- We can think of the widow in Zarapheth, who was about to eat her last meal and die with her son - but God heard and saw her...
- And then we can fast forward to when God appeared to a teen virgin called Mary...God saw her and told her that she would give birth to a son called Jesus. He is going to be the son of God.
- And Mary sung these words in response to God's plan:
 - Luke 1:51 "He has shown strength with his arm;
 - he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
 - 52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
 - and exalted those of humble estate;
 - 53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
 - and the rich he has sent away empty.
 - 54 He has helped his servant Israel,
 - in remembrance of his mercy,
 - 55 as he spoke to our fathers,
 - to Abraham and to his offspring forever."
- God is a God who exults those who are humble...those who are hungry...blessed are the poor and humble in heart...
- And this Jesus came not hanging out with the "Good" people, but with the lowly, sinners and adulterers and the poor and the sick and the oppressed.
- And he was a man who knew grief. A man who was rejected and opposed and experienced injustice - as he was nailed to the cross even though innocent on our behalf.
- So that all who call upon the name of the Lord - all who turn to Jesus as Lord can have salvation from sin and death, and will be brought into relationship with the God who sees and hears our cries, right here right now.
- And then he'll return to wipe every tear from our eyes. And bring us into his new creation where there will be no more pain or suffering, or oppression, or violence, or injustice...//

- You may be here and have experienced oppression like Hagar did;
- Maybe you've experienced injustice like this and you feel like nobody can know what it's like OR you feel isolated and alone...
- Maybe you're suffering in silence with poor physical or mental health...worried or afraid about what the next month or years ahead hold...
- God is the God who sees you...the God who loves and has redeemed you. These promises of salvation and blessing are yours through the tenderness of Jesus Christ.
- And not only can we call YHW our God...but we can call him our Father in Heaven who sees all things and knows all things.

- And he calls on us in the midst of our oppression or anxiety to cast all our anxieties on him, because he cares for us...
- He calls on us to rejoice in all circumstances and pray to him...talk to him about what's happening...complain to him, be angry at him, vent to him!
 - It's better to whinge at God than to pretend that he doesn't exist by ignoring him!
- And the peace of God which makes no sense will guard your hearts and minds in him. Both now and forevermore. Amen.