

Genesis 16:1-6 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. <sup>5</sup> 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!" <sup>6</sup> 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.

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## Announcements:

1. Membership is available at [info@redemptiondenver.com](mailto:info@redemptiondenver.com)
2. Next Week! 1 year Anniversary Celebration
3. RCD Kids Volunteer Training: 3/14 11am -12pm

## Genesis 16:7-21 | Hagar & Ishmael

The first question in the Westminster shorter catechism is:

What is the chief end of man?

Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

This means humanity has a built in need for God. Our highest end is his glory, and he is our only true source of joy. This means that we are dependent creatures. We need our joy to come from outside of us, we don't find satisfaction in pursuing our own glory, but only the glory of our creator.

Part of our fall into sin is our resentment of this fact of our dependence. In God all of us live and move and have our being, and yet in our heart of hearts we resent him for it. God provides all that we have, but instead of being grateful for his gifts we resent that we need him. We long to get rid of him and be accomplished or satisfied in our selves alone, or by means that we define for ourselves.

Today we'll see one story of three interrelated people who seek to throw off the constraint of our dependence upon God. It doesn't go well, but God remains faithful.

Sarah's takes responsibility where she shouldn't.

Abraham abandons responsibility where he should take it.

Hagar flees the authority of God.

## 1. Try things my way

Genesis 16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar.

We've seen throughout this whole narrative of Abram the tension around the promise from God to provide the land of Canaan and offspring. This promise has been reiterated by God in multiple ways and many of the doubts surrounding it have been specifically addressed by God. Abram wondered if he would truly receive the land, and God described the very nations and boundaries that his offspring would overthrow. Likewise, Abram wondered if it would truly be his own offspring who would be his heir or if it would be the offspring of one of his servants, whom he might adopt as an heir. God quelled this fear, stating that the offspring would come from Abram's "very own loins."

But at this point ten years have passed in the land of Canaan, and Sarai, Abram's wife, has borne him no children. As time goes on, God is pressing this couple into a place of greater dependence on him, backing them into a corner in which the only way out is through the miraculous working of God. But this couple, like us, doesn't want to find themselves in a place of true dependence, but would rather be in control of both the means and the outcome. Sarai devises a plan that gets at the one remaining loophole that God hasn't addressed. Sure the offspring is promised to come from Abram's loins, but what about his wife? God didn't say anything about that.

Genesis 16:2 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.

This is not an uncommon practice in those days, but this does step outside the marital structure that God put in place at creation. One man and one woman. It is a case of adultery with a purpose and it causes total disruption the family.

Here is the dynamic, Sarai is taking responsibility for the outcome of something that does not belong to her, namely the fulfillment of God's promise. Secondly she is taking control in her marriage in a way that does not belong to her, advocating for another party in her marriage. And lastly she is taking control over an aspect of another's humanity that does not belong to her, namely her servant's body.

Before we look down on Sarai, let's consider some the deals we make in our culture for what we value. We speak as though the center of a fulfilled life is sexual gratification, therefore you need to do whatever it takes to be fulfilled. That's why we have so many hero adultery stories, extra points by the way if you're cheating to discover your own homosexuality. Or consider startup culture, that demands total commitment to the company no matter what it

costs your children. Sarai's commitment to the fulfillment narrative of her day is no more absurd. She'll sacrifice a family to get a family, but right when she accomplishes her plan she resents it.

Genesis 16:4 And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived.  
And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked  
with contempt on her mistress.

Edwin Friedman, in his book, *Generation to Generation*, presents two ideas that are important to grasp to interpret this family dynamic. One is the idea of the identified patient, this is the person who from the outside looking in has the real issues. In this story it is easy to see Sarai as the identified patient. She is acting rashly and showing illogical contempt. But when you're looking at a family dysfunction you need to keep your eye out for the symmetry. If there is a giver in the relationship, look for the taker. Pursuer & pursued, anxious & reassurer, take charge & along for the ride. Accuser & pacifier.

Genesis 16:5 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!"

Sarai begins lashing out at everyone involved at exactly the places she put them in, but sees herself as the victim of the contempt that she is perpetuating. But look for the symmetry.

Genesis 16:6 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.

Throughout this whole story, Abram doesn't take any responsibility. He doesn't help his wife depend upon the promise of God. He doesn't guard their marriage by denying her request. He doesn't defend Hagar from the contempt of Sarai. In his absence he is supportive of the sinister dynamic that is unfolding that leads to Hagar fleeing the family because of the abuse she is receiving.

It begins with throwing off the constraints of our dependence on God, and ends with all subsequent relationships being fractured. Now many of you are a part of family dynamics like this one, or working relationships like this, that feel just broken beyond repair. But God moves right into this area of brokenness and over the next several chapters we'll see how God brings Abram to a place of committed action, Sarai from a clenched fist of control to an openhanded laughter, and now we see Hagar from invisible victim to seen by God.

## 2. Reconciliation

Genesis 16:7-8 The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.

<sup>8</sup> 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 seeks out the fleeing single mother. She is by a spring on the way to Shur which is on the way back to Egypt, where she was from. Now notice the way that God greets her, you can hear right in the greeting what his intentions are. He names her as servant of Sarai, and asks where have you come from and where are you going? He causes her to confront her whole story, and in her very response she must state the contradiction. She is fleeing from her mistress, Sarai.

Genesis 16:9 The angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her."

God calls her back into the position that he has placed her in, servant of Sarai. Now this is a difficult concept for us to wrap our minds around because we live in a state with very different conventions, but the important thing to see is that God is showing her that the authority that is in her life has been placed there by God. But this is not a humiliating authority to be under, because in submitting to Sarai who is currently acting wickedly, Hagar is truly submitting to God. And God has good purposes in store for her.

Genesis 16:10 The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude."

God lifts her eyes from the brutality of the past and the origin of her child, towards a vast future promise. And although it is not a promise akin to Abram's, it is not a thread of redemptive history, it shows God as one who draws close to the outcast. The promise extends as God names Ishmael her son, meaning God hears, because God says he has seen her affliction. And part of the promise of his life is that "he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." Bottom line, he won't be a servant.

Genesis 16:13-14 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." <sup>14</sup> Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

The name of the well means, "the well of the living one who sees me."

What we're seeing here is what happens when our families, and our lives come out of alignment, because of our sin and the sin of others. God rushes in, often to the weakest and most invisible part and he begins to bring his intentions back into alignment. This is precisely the movement in the heart of God as he sends his Son into submission under the most wicked regime, so that in his brokenness we might be brought back into alignment. It is a project of a God who desires redemption and salvation.