

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

August 13, 2023 "How to Survive a Storm. Assess the damage. Evaluating the extent of the loss. Tarp what's left."

I Intro.

Well summer is unofficially over but we still have the heat. Things are cranking back up and we want you to be a part of this great community. We hope you are fed and ministered to by NCC, and that you can be an essential part of us moving forward. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

II Recap.

So, we're on the second Sunday of our **"How to survive a storm"** series. And just like when we have to recover from a major weather storm (like we're still doing at NCC) when a storm of life rips through our world, there are some translatable truths that can help us both survive and recover from the storms of life. And we're looking at the life of characters in the Old Testament to see how they handled their storms. Pulling truths that we can specifically apply to our lives. Last week we looked at the life of Elijah, a prophet of God, and how he had to weather his own storm. In those first few days of the storm, it's about finding a safe place to hunker down and take care of yourself. Time will come later to do the work that needs to be done. When the storm hits, and in those early days, it's just taking care of yourself. Today we talk about the next phase of evaluating the extent of the loss.

III Sunday.

And a heads up. This is one of the toughest and most difficult stories in scripture. Just like the storms in our lives. The story of Hagar has very little upside. Hagar gets hit by one storm after another. Her life never really recovers completely. Her new reality is painfully tough. But there are things that we learn...especially about God, that can help us in this next stage of surviving our own personal storms. So, before we dive into the lengthy story of Hagar some thought provoking questions.

When you face your own personal storm, a difficult situation, what helps you keep your bearings?

After you get your bearings a bit, reorient yourself, what helps you determine your next steps?

The story of Hagar is spread over several chapters in Genesis. For some basic background info, the story centers around the couple Abram and Sarai who would eventually become Abraham and Sarah. They were nomads who had no real place of their own. God meets Abram, tells him he wants to make a great nation of him and his descendants. But, nothing was happening. Both Abram and Sarai were starting to age out of having kids. And this is where we pick up this story. Read **Genesis chapters 16 and 21.**

What jumped out to you from these two chapters?

What do you believe life was like for Hagar?

What did you see about God that can help in our own personal storms?

You can clearly see how painful and tragic Hagar's life was. And it ended pretty much that way also. A few things about this story before we give some insights about this stage (remember not steps) of surviving a storm. We have to wrap our minds around the truth that Hagar was a captured servant of Abram and Sarai. Yes, times were different back then, but that doesn't change this fact. We also have to wrestle with the fact that Hagar was forced into a 'marriage' (we're not sure what that really means) to Abram, and to carry his child for his benefit. She is basically a Sally Hemmings figure. All of those are hard facts to wrestle with, and look differently in 2023 than they probably did back then.

But it should create some solidarity with Hagar. She is a victim. She is powerless over her life, and her storms were not of her doing. And that's how storms can be. Storms hit because we don't have the control or power to avoid them. That's why we need to understand how Hagar handled her many storms, and how she still found God in the midst of them. So, one question.

When was a time for you when a storm hit and revealed just where you are in life?

There are some specifics we can pull from Hagar's life to help us after our storm hits.

1. You're going to have LOTS of feelings ... all over the place.

This is just a reality of life. Hagar was a victim from the beginning. A servant. Forced to carry Abram's child. This was just the clouds building on the horizon. A storm she could see coming. She was put in a position, forced into a situation that had no good ending for her. She was trapped in the path of the storm, and she had no way out. This is how the storms of life are. Build into your understanding of storms that will come your way. You will feel like a victim, and often are powerless against stopping what is happening to you. And that will just flood your spirit with all sorts of emotions. Just feel them.

2. You're going to wander aimlessly for a while.

The storms of life are extremely disorienting. This truth is built into the understanding of how we react, and then move through, whatever storms we face. This is the work and process of reorienting ourselves after the storm. The passage says Hagar "*wandered aimlessly*" until she basically came to herself. In reorienting there is: **assessing what happened, getting your bearings, and then beginning to figure out what you've actually lost and what you still have**. This isn't any kind of strategy or planning. You're not quite there yet. It's working through your feelings, and getting your head together. Often there is no specific plan or template for this. Honestly, it's mostly trial and error. Don't feel the unnecessary urgency to figure everything out yet. Give yourself permission to wander about aimlessly...for a while.

3. Determine what you do have (assets) and protect them.

No matter how bad the storm was, you still have some things that are good and can help you. You just may not have them in the front of your mind at the moment. But it's simply a realization Hagar kind of missed. But God reminded her of it. She was alive, she still had her son, and there was some water and a place to rest. **This is the work of reclaiming your power in God.** Storms take our power away. Reminds you that you're not in control. **But you do have agency**. Hagar was in rough shape, and a tough place...lost and aimless. We're here to say that's what the storms of life do to us. But we are not without. We are not alone. We can still find good things in our life.

4. God is ALWAYS with you.

Did I tell you Hagar was not one of the chosen? She was Egyptian and didn't have any special or chosen status. In the midst of all Hagar was dealing with, all her emotions, feelings around this, wandering aimlessly trying to figure out what to do, even nearly giving up, we see **God never abandoned her**. Now the presence of God isn't always being rescued or delivered from the storm. Hagar was still in the desert, alone, trying to figure out what to do next. But it's finding what you need to make it through, finding the other side...with God. No matter what the storm was, whether you could have done anything or not, whether you handled it well or not, whether you bear some responsibility or not, whether you're one of the chosen or not. **GOD IS WITH YOU!!**

IV Challenge.

Wrapping this all up, we have to admit the story of Hagar is really tough. It starts with Hagar in an unfair and difficult situation not of her own doing. And ends ... painfully. We know that's the nature of storms. Here in LaGrange when I drive in the neighborhoods where tornadoes have ripped through, many of the houses are still torn apart. And those people are still trying to figure out how to put their lives back together. Even these many months later. Just like the story of Hagar. And that's where we can find some hope and encouragement. In all that Hagar experienced, had happened to her, she still found favor with God. He **saw** her and **heard** her. God did not abandon her. Even in the middle or the aftermath of our own personal storms we can find the same God seeing and hearing us. Know and claim this truth. And this will help you on this next stage of surviving a storm.

So, how can you lean into and claim this truth in the middle of your life, that God both sees you and hears you?