

GENESIS

RockPointe Church Small Groups

Patriarchs of Scripture • Hagar and Ishmael • Genesis 16:1-16 and 21:1-21 • Fall 2018

Main Point

The key to overcoming the jealousy that hinders our relationship with God and others is to trust God's promises and savor His grace.

Background

Video: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/VideoElement/182904>

Note: Requires Access to Right Now Media; if you have issues with accessing the link, copy and paste directly in your browser

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is the best news a friend or family member shared with you recently? What made this news so good in their eyes?

How did you respond to the good news of your friend? Are you always happy for other people when they share good news with you? Why or why not?

While we would like to think that we are always happy for our friends when they receive good news, this is not always the case. If we are honest, we often struggle with feelings of resentment, particularly when those closest to us receive blessings we think we deserve. This was the case with Abraham's wife, Sarah. God had promised her a son but when she witnessed her servant, Hagar, give birth to a son first, she was consumed with envy. By looking at the story of Sarah and Hagar, we will see that jealousy, if left unchecked, hinders both our relationship with God and others. If we hope to overcome the jealousy that corrupts our hearts we must strive to trust God's promises and savor His grace.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Read Romans 12:15. It is easy to see the value of mourning with those who mourn, but why is it equally important that we strive to rejoice with those who rejoice? What motives lie at the root of a refusal to rejoice when God shows grace to others?

Pride lies at the root of a heart that refuses to rejoice in the grace God shows to others. This is why Paul challenged the church at Rome "by the grace given to me, I tell everyone of you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one" (Rom. 12:3). As sinners, we all have a tendency to think much of ourselves and less of others. To think this

way, however, is to lose sight both of God's grace and His promises. We will see this principle play out in the story of Sarah and Hagar.

| Have a volunteer read Genesis 16:1-16.

What motivated Sarah to ask Abraham to have a child with their servant, Hagar? What does this request tell us about the state of Sarah and Abraham's faith?

Have you ever tried to take matters into your own hands rather than trusting and waiting on God? What happened as a result?

At 75 years old, Sarah assumed she was past childbearing age. All she knew of God's promise (Gen. 12:1-3) was that she and Abraham would have an heir, so Sarah took the initiative to provide that heir by using Hagar, her servant, as a surrogate mother. While this was a custom in their day, and Sarah and Abraham didn't know how God's plan would unfold, their action revealed a lack of trust in God's ability to provide. When the situation appeared hopeless, Abraham and Sarah momentarily forgot the promises of God and turned to their own devices.

How did Sarah's jealousy affect Hagar and Ishmael? What effects have you seen in your life and the lives of those around you when you've given into jealousy?

Abraham had a history of taking matters into his own hands when He started to doubt God's involvement. In this situation, his and Sarah's mistake had immediate consequences. Sarah was filled with jealousy, their marriage suffered discord, and Hagar felt contempt toward Sarah. Hagar had no choice but to comply with their scheme, and by the time the baby was actually born, Sarah rejected him. The sad truth is that Sarah and Abraham's jealousy had consequences not only for them, but also for the people around them.

Look at verses 7-12. Why did God prevent Hagar from fleeing? What does this tell us about God?

How did Hagar respond to God's Word that was delivered to her through the angel of the LORD (vv. 13-14)?

If anyone had reason to be bitter, it was Hagar. And yet, despite the bitter persecution she received at the hands of Sarah, Hagar trusted God's Word and returned to serve Sarah and Abraham. We don't know why God chose to seek out Hagar and command her to return but His reassurance to Hagar that she would have a son is a demonstration of His unmerited kindness. Hagar clearly interpreted God's Words to her as a demonstration of His grace as she called the LORD "The God Who Sees" (v. 13), indicating that God saw and answered her in her affliction. Recognizing God's presence and grace in our lives is a great first step to overcoming the jealousy that so easily consumes us.

| have a volunteer read Genesis 21:1-21.

Given Sarah's jealousy and lack of faith (see Gen. 18:9-15), how would you expect God to respond to her? Why didn't Sarah's actions disqualify her from receiving God's blessing? What does that tell us about God?

One definition of grace is "unmerited favor." How might acknowledging God's grace in our lives help us to overcome feelings of jealousy, resentment, and bitterness?

Verses 6-7 point out that Sarah again laughed (see Gen. 18:12-15) at what God had done in her life. How was her laughter different this time?

While we might expect Sarah's suspect faith and bitter resentment to disqualify her from receiving God's great promise to give her a son who would bless all nations, this is not the case. Thankfully, God's blessing is not contingent upon our performance or good deeds. Grace, by its very definition, is always undeserved. In Genesis 21 God follows through in fulfilling a promise that neither Abraham or Sarah deserved by giving them a son in their old age. When Sarah first laughed at God's promise (Gen. 18:12-15), she revealed her doubt in His power and her lack of faith in Him. But now that God had made good on His promise, Sarah's laughter revealed her awe and amazement at what He accomplished through her. Finally she arrived at a place of trust and gratitude.

Did receiving the promise of a son cure Sarah of her jealousy (vv. 9-11)? What caused Sarah to lose sight of God's grace and fall back into jealousy?

God continued to show kindness to Hagar in the face of Sarah's bitter actions (vv. 15-21). How might remembering the persistent nature of God's grace help us overcome feelings of jealousy?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What causes you to lose sight of the grace of God in your life? How can we maintain our focus on God's grace when life is difficult? What about when life is good?

How do we demonstrate faith in the gospel when we rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15)? What are some practical measures we could take to respond joyfully to the grace of God in the lives of those around us?

What promises of God could you hold on to this week as you seek to cultivate a heart of gratitude to God? What might it look like for you not only acknowledge God's grace but also savor it?

Pray

Thank God for His unmerited love and kindness. Pray that He would help us let go of our jealousy by remembering His promises and savoring His grace.

Commentary

| Genesis 16:1-16

16:1. The issue of providing an heir from Abram's own body (cp. 15:3-4) reappears. Abram's wife, Sarai, was now 75 years old and well past her childbearing years. However, she did own an Egyptian slave named Hagar, probably acquired when she lived in Egypt (12:16).

16:2-3. Sarai faced a dilemma. On the one hand, the Lord had prevented her—Abram's only wife—from bearing children. On the other hand, the Lord promised that her husband would become a father. To "fix" the problem, she ordered her husband to go to her slave—quite possibly a teenager—and try to build a family through her. Abram, now 85, agreed. Sarai likely intended to use Hagar as a surrogate mother, and then adopt the child as her own. In offering something that was tempting but not appropriate to her husband, Sarai was imitating Eve's fateful actions in the garden of Eden (3:6).

16:4. The young slave girl found herself carrying the child of the most important man in the clan—something Sarai had never done. As a result, Hagar treated her mistress with contempt.

16:5. Sarai, whose inadequacies were highlighted with Hagar's pregnancy, now found her own suffering unbearable. Abram had caused the pregnancy; thus he was responsible for Sarai's slave girl looking down on her. Sarai called on the Lord to hold Abram accountable for her humiliation and pain.

16:6. Though Hagar was now his wife (v. 3), Abram relinquished his rights to her. Hagar was once again no more than Sarai's slave.

16:7-8. Hagar could run away from Sarai, but not from the Angel of the Lord. He found her at a spring on a road leading to Shur and Egypt, where she might have been able to get assistance from passing caravans. Hagar, like many runaways, could say where she was from, but ignored the question of where she was going.

16:9-10. The Angel of the Lord directed Hagar to go back and submit to Sarai. The true source of Hagar's problems was her own bad attitude, not her owner. By obeying the Angel's divine guidance, she and her offspring would receive a tremendous blessing. God's promise to multiply her descendants both paralleled and enhanced the promise given to Abram (15:5).

16:11-12. This is the final and longest of three consecutive speeches by the Angel to Hagar. Hagar is told that she will have a son, the more prestigious gender of offspring for a woman in the ancient Near East to bear. Then she is directed to name her son Ishmael ("God hears"), in recognition of the fact that the Lord ... heard her cry of affliction. In the climactic final quatrain, character and destiny are presented: the boy will live outside of cultured society like a wild donkey... at odds with all his brothers.

16:13-14. In wonder-filled recognition of God's intervention in her life, Hagar gave the Lord the title "The God Who Sees" (or "The God Who Sees Me"). She is thus the only person in the Bible who is said to have

renamed Yahweh. The Asian custom of naming/renaming someone was always associated with the possession of authority over the one being named. To rename God would normally be considered blasphemous. Perhaps Hagar's lack of restraint in renaming the Lord was due to the fact that she was quite young and was a spiritually uninformed Egyptian slave.

| Genesis 21:1-21

21:1-2. The setting is Abraham's household where the early days of Isaac's birth and circumcision are recalled. Verses 1-7 consist of a birth narrative (vv. 1-4) and the exultation of Sarah at the birth of her child in Abraham's old age (vv. 5-7). Verses 1-2 describe the visitation of the Lord, resulting in the miraculous pregnancy of Sarah who bears a son "to Abraham in his old age" (vv. 2, 7). Verse 1 possesses parallel half-lines, emphasizing the faithfulness of the divine word revealed to Abraham and Sarah (17:16, 19; 18:10, 14). Not only was Sarah's pregnancy impossible by human resources alone, but the birth was at the "very time" promised.

21:3-4. Verses 3-4 describe Abraham's obedient response at Isaac's birth: he names (17:16) and circumcises the child on the eighth day (17:10, 12, 19) precisely as the Lord had directed.

21:5-7. This paragraph ties together the explanation of Isaac's name and the elderly age of the parents. Dual references to the age of Abraham form the boundaries of the passage (vv. 5a, 7b). Abraham, the narration clarifies, is a century of years (v. 5), and Sarah radiates with happiness at the thought she bears Isaac to her husband "in his old age" (v. 7b).

Sandwiched between the chronological notices is the explanation for the name Isaac (vv. 6-7a). Usually the person who names the child also provides the explanation, whether mother or father (4:24; 5:29). In this case the father announced the name (v. 3), and the mother supplied its significance. Moreover, customarily if an explanation occurs, it immediately follows the giving of the name, but here the narrative describing the circumcision of the boy (v. 4) and the age of the patriarch (v. 5) intervene. These modifications are made to point out the importance of each parent in the work of grace. Abraham's doubting laughter is transformed into obedient faith by his naming the child Isaac as the Lord has said (17:17, 19). Verses 4-5 continue the narrative's attention to the father's obedience. Sarah's doubting laughter is transformed into a joyous faith (18:12-13). This privilege of declaration in vv. 6-7 is appropriately Sarah's, for she after all was the butt of the joke as the barren wife (16:4). The language of the birth report in vv. 3 and 5 are a literary reflex of the parallel episode of Ishmael's birth and naming (16:15-16). By the similarity in language, the passage points up the remarkable nature of the child's birth to parents in their elderly state. Sarah's exuberance rightly attributes the child to God, who grants her "laughter"; here she makes her point by a play, substituting "laughter" for the name "Isaac," v. 6a.

21:8-10. The Bible does not indicate Isaac's age when he was weaned. In some cultures, children receive nourishment from their mother into their fifth year; beyond age two this provides comfort more than nourishment. When the day came for Isaac to be weaned, Abraham held a great feast to assist the child

psychologically in taking this step. During the party, however, Ishmael was mocking Isaac. The apostle Paul understood this to mean he was persecuting Isaac (Gal 4:29). “Drive out” (Hb garash) is the same term used to describe the expulsions of Adam and Cain following their sins (3:24; 4:14).

21:11-13. It was a very difficult thing for Abraham (lit “it was very bad in Abraham’s eyes”) to expel his firstborn son from the household. However, God’s guidance and comforting assurances enabled Abraham to do the right thing. Because Ishmael was Abraham’s offspring, God would not allow the child to die in the wilderness; instead, God would make him a nation. And though Isaac was not Abraham’s firstborn, the patriarch’s offspring would be traced through his lineage.

21:14-19. Abraham’s love and concern for Hagar and Ishmael are reflected in his diligence—getting up early and giving them provisions. The banished pair wandered in the Wilderness of Beer-sheba, an area some 20 miles west of the southern end of the Dead Sea. When Hagar and Ishmael ran out of water, Ishmael almost died, perhaps of heatstroke. Overwhelmed with grief, Hagar placed him in the shadow of one of the bushes and then went about a bowshot away—just far enough to avoid hearing his voice as he lay dying. Though Hagar may not have known that where there is large vegetation in a desert there is also a high water table, God opened her eyes to the fact that a well of water was nearby. God had providentially directed her wanderings and given her a demonstration of His faithfulness.

21:20-21. Honoring His promises to Abraham (v. 13; 17:20) and Hagar (21:18), God protected Ishmael, who eventually settled in the Wilderness of Paran, west of the Gulf of Aqaba in the northern Sinai Desert. Hagar, who was herself an Egyptian (16:3), got her son an Egyptian wife. Ishmael would produce 12 sons (25:13-15).