



Parkway Fellowship

Family Feuds • Sarai vs Hagar • Genesis 16:1-13; 21:1-3 • 10/21/2018

Main Point

God sees you, knows you, loves you, and works in your life despite your mistakes.

Introduction

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

Who in your family tends to take charge when decisions need to be made? Who tends to keep quiet and go with the flow?

What are some challenges people who take charge might face in their relationship with the Lord? In their relationships with other people?

What are some challenges people who go with the flow might face in their relationship with the Lord? In their relationships with other people?

Some of us have personalities bent toward taking charge. That's fine when no one can decide where to eat for lunch, but in other situations it can cause a lot of problems. Others have personalities where we allow life to happen to us and then when we don't like the way it goes, we want to pack up and run away from it all. In

both cases, we're tempted to distrust God and take matters into our own hands. In today's study of Abraham's family, we'll be reminded that no matter how you feel about your circumstances, God sees and knows your situation, which means He can be trusted.

Understanding

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

| Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 16:1-4a.

What might have prompted Abram and Sarai to take matters into their own hands?

Read Genesis 12:10-20. What does this passage, along with Genesis 16:1-4a, tell us about Abram?

The events of Genesis 16 follow God's covenant with Abram, when God promised Abram that his offspring would be as great as the stars. In chapter 16, the focus shifts from Abram to Sarai. At 75 years old, Sarai rightly assumed she was past childbearing age. All they knew of God's promise was that they would have an heir, so Sarai 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 Sarai and Abram 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, Abram and Sarai momentarily forgot the promises of God and turned to their own devices.

What are some common ways parents try to take their children's matters into their own hands? What are some ways husbands and wives try to take their spouse's matters into their own hands?

Have you ever tried to "help" God by devising your own plan? How did it turn out?

What does taking matters into your own hands imply what you believe about God?

Abram had a history of taking matters into his own hands when He started to doubt God's involvement, and it caused problems for his family for generations to come. Instead of accomplishing God's will, Abram and Sarai created discord and pain. God made Ishmael into a great nation too (Islam), and the descendants of Ishmael have been in conflict with the descendants of Isaac since then.

| Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 16:4b-6.

Finish verse 4 in a positive way: "When she saw that Hagar had conceived, Sarai _____."

How might things have turned out differently if Sarai and Hagar had chosen to work it out?

How do you typically respond when you've made a sinful decision: I immediately work to make amends, I let it play out, I blame others, I push forward because I don't like to admit I'm wrong, other?

One of our biggest mistakes as families is that we take our regrets and frustrations out on our families. Sarai was filled with jealousy, their marriage suffered discord, and Hagar felt contempt toward Sarai. Everyone resented everyone. Hagar had no choice but to comply with their scheme, and by the time the baby was actually born, Sarai rejected him. The sad truth is that Sarai and Abram's disbelief had consequences not only for them, but also for the people around them.

What were the immediate effects of Abram and Sarai's decision to take matters into their own hands?

What effects have you seen in your life and the lives of those around you when you've failed to trust God?

Compare this account with the account of the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. What similarities do you see between the two situations?

Abram and Sarai aren't the only people who have taken matters into their own hands when the waiting seems interminable. It's easy to grow antsy and impatient when our present reality doesn't reflect the promises to which we cling. But when we refuse to wait on God's perfect timing, we deny Him the opportunity to glorify Himself in and through us, and our plans rarely succeed. We must avoid the tendency to make our own plans and ask God to bless them. In the next set of verses, we will see Hagar's reaction to this situation.

| Ask a volunteer to read Genesis 16:7-13; 21:1-2.

How did God comfort Hagar?

Why did God insist that Hagar submit to Sarai's authority?

Is it surprising to you that, after all this, God blessed Sarai and gave her a son? Why or why not?

Because of how Sarai treated Hagar, Hagar ran away from their home. After she fled, an angel of the Lord found her in the desert. The angel offered Hagar comfort and instruction. Hagar learned that the Lord heard (v. 11) and saw (v. 13) her sorrow.

Even after Sarai sinned by giving Hagar to Abram, mistreated Hagar, and disbelieved the Lord, He still gave her a son to accomplish His purposes. God fulfills His promises, and He works in our lives despite our mistakes.

Read Deuteronomy 5:8-10. How do you see these verses at work in the story of Abram, Sarai, and Hagar?

What do today's readings teach you about God and family?

Describe a time in your life when you were comforted by knowing that God sees you and that you matter to Him?

Faith demands that we believe some incredible things on a daily basis, and that extends to the relationships in our lives that cause us the most difficulty and worry. We believe that God speaks to us through His Word. We believe He sent His Son to restore our relationship with Him. We believe that same Son got up and walked out of a tomb after He had been dead for three days. We believe that the rewards of a faithful life include eternity in paradise and unbroken fellowship with God. We believe that God performs miracles, even today. We believe that God cares about the details of our lives, and perhaps most astonishingly, we believe that God Almighty loves us, in spite of our sinfulness. As a result, God expects us to trust Him and rest in His promises.

Application

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

How would you counsel someone who thinks their past disqualifies them from experiencing the fullness of God's blessings in the future?

How should being reminded that God is “the God who sees” impact the way you relate to family members?

What do you need to trust God with? How can our group hold you accountable and encourage you in that effort?

Pray

Thank God that your past sins don't disqualify you from His love. Invite Him to show you areas where you need to trust Him more and give you the courage to resist the temptation to take matters into your own hands.

Commentary

| Genesis 16:1-13

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 21:1-3

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.