

BEHIND THE SEEN

*A 7-Week In-Depth Bible Study*

# HAGAR

Rediscovering the God Who Sees Me



Shadia Hrichi



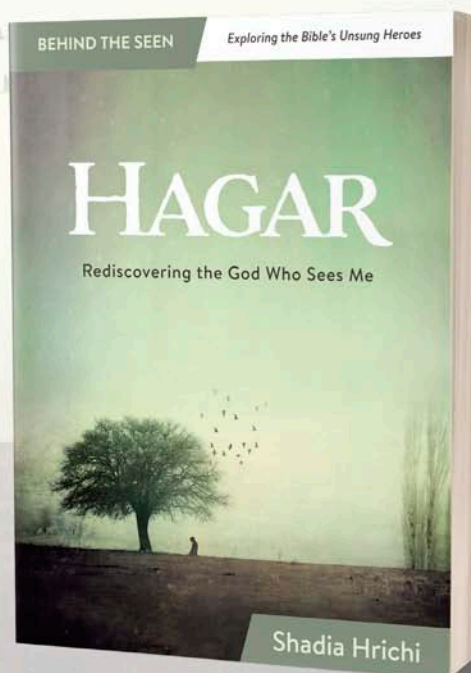
# HAGAR

## Rediscovering the God Who Sees Me

If someone were to ask you to name a few famous Bible characters, Hagar would probably not be at the top of your list. After all, how much do we really know about this young slave girl? She is often relegated to the backstage as a minor character in God's redemptive story. But was she? Do you know how her story ends? Rest assured that it does not end in despair. In fact, she emerges victorious!

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## About The Author

Shadia Hrichi is a passionate Bible teacher who has a heart for seeing lives transformed by the power of God's Word. She has received a master's in biblical and theological studies from Western Seminary, as well as a master's in criminal justice from the State University of New York. Shadia is the author of several books, including *Worthy of Love*, and is often invited to speak at churches, conferences, and other events. Residing in northern California, Shadia is an active member of Venture Christian Church and loves to visit the ocean each week for "a date with Jesus."



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## Praise for *Hagar*

“This study is deep and packed with surprising insights! I enjoyed exploring the story of Hagar—an often-discarded woman who played a profound part in human history. I love how Shadia weaves in her personal experiences, helping readers connect with her and understand how to apply the teaching to their own lives. This study beautifully captures the depth of God’s love for all people. I am excited to share it with others!

—**Francine Rivers**, international best-selling author

“This study is a personal and compelling guide to a powerful and underappreciated story of God’s faithfulness.”

—**Bible Study Magazine**, a publication of Faithlife, the creator of Logos Bible Software

“Few biblical stories illustrate hope in the hard places of life better than Hagar’s. Shadia beautifully illuminates that hope, offering encouragement not only for the destination of our lives but also for the journey. Through this study, readers will be inspired to trust God, embrace His purposes, and experience His victory.”

—**Chris Tiegreen**, author of the *Dancing in the Desert Devotional Bible* and various One Year devotionals

“This refreshing study digs deep into the life of Hagar. . . . Thought provoking and practical, it will help readers develop a desire to serve our Savior. I highly recommend it!”

—**Fouad Masri**, founder and president of Crescent Project

“*Hagar: Rediscovering the God Who Sees Me* is certain to inspire its readers to go deeper in understanding God’s unfathomable love and purposes, specifically amid our personal heartaches and pain. . . . This extensive study draws us deeper into the biblical text to search for answers. There we find ourselves prompted by Shadia’s own transparency to surface our intimate longings. Relating to Hagar as a person who was used, abused, and rejected brings us face-to-face with a God who reaches far beyond cultural expectations to meet Hagar in the midst of her pain. This study will lead you there as well.”

—**Bev Hislop**, D.Min., author of *Shepherding a Woman’s Heart* and professor emerita of Pastoral Care, Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon

“Hagar is sometimes downplayed as a minor and almost expendable figure in the more prominent story of Abraham and Sarah, but Shadia Hrichi’s book reveals a complex and fascinating woman facing the same spiritual struggles as the rest of us. All of us have something to learn from this woman who suffered despair, rejection, and abuse but still managed to find hope in the One she called the ‘God Who Sees Me.’”

—**Joseph Bentz**, author of *Nothing is Wasted*

“A Bible study on Sarah’s Egyptian slave girl? I’ve never done a study on Hagar before, but Shadia reveals that there is more to Hagar’s story than meets the eye. She was used and abandoned. Where was God in that? I’ve also wrestled with this question at times. Who hasn’t? Thank you, Shadia, for opening my eyes to Hagar’s story; in doing so, it helped me to see myself.”

—**Kay Marshall Strom**, author and international speaker

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Shadia Hrichi



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## HAGAR

*Rediscovering the God Who Sees Me*



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# CONTENTS

|                                               |     |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|
| Acknowledgments .....                         | 7   |
| About the Author .....                        | 9   |
| About the Study .....                         | 10  |
| Group Study Tips .....                        | 11  |
| A Note from the Author .....                  | 13  |
| Introduction .....                            | 15  |
| <br><b>Part I: Wounded</b>                    |     |
| Week One: Discovering God's Presence .....    | 19  |
| Week Two: Encountering God's Peace .....      | 49  |
| <br><b>Part II: Wandering</b>                 |     |
| Week Three: Resting on God's Promise .....    | 83  |
| Week Four: Trusting in God's Protection ..... | 117 |
| <br><b>Part III: Waiting</b>                  |     |
| Week Five: Surrendering to God's Plan .....   | 157 |
| Week Six: Witnessing God's Passion .....      | 191 |
| <br><b>Part IV: Wedding</b>                   |     |
| Week Seven: Celebrating God's Purpose .....   | 229 |
| Leader Guide .....                            | 263 |

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

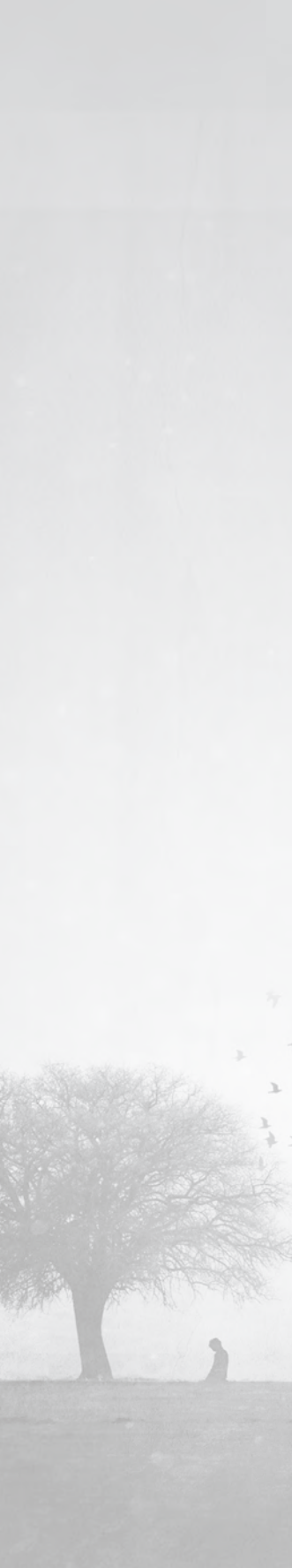


**SHADIA HRICHI IS A PASSIONATE BIBLE** teacher, author, and speaker who has a heart for seeing lives transformed by the power of God's Word. Having experienced much heartache, such as a broken home, abortion, and divorce, Shadia captures the hearts of

her audience as she illustrates God's love, faithfulness, and power of redemption through her personal experiences.

She has received a master's in biblical and theological studies from Western Seminary, as well as a master's in criminal justice from the State University of New York. Shadia is the author of several books, including *Legion: Rediscovering the God Who Rescues Me*, the second study in her Behind the Seen series, and *Worthy of Love*, a story-driven Bible study for post-abortion healing. In addition to teaching Bible studies, Shadia is often invited to speak at churches, conferences, and other events. Her insightful, witty, yet vulnerable teaching style reveals a compassion for the hurting, love for Jesus, and uncompromising commitment to the truth of God's Word.

Residing in northern California, Shadia is an active member of Venture Christian Church and loves visiting the ocean each week for "a date with Jesus." Be sure to visit [www.shadiahrichi.com](http://www.shadiahrichi.com) and sign up for updates to be among the first to find out about Shadia's next study.



## ABOUT THE STUDY

**WELCOME! I AM THRILLED THAT YOU DESIRE TO JOURNEY** with me in *Rediscovering the God Who Sees Me!* God has so much to teach us through Hagar's story, and I can hardly wait for us to get started.

This book is divided into seven weeks, each comprised of five days of personal study. Each day includes one or more questions suitable for group discussion. These questions are followed by a ☺. Be sure not to overlook these questions even if you are working through the material on your own. There are also Pause to Ponder sections throughout the study. These are designed to provide you with a time of personal reflection. Use the space in the margins (or if you prefer, a journal or notebook) to respond to these questions. For readers desiring to dig even deeper, I've prepared extra questions, which are preceded by a ☺.

Each day of study will take approximately 45 minutes. If you have time to go deeper, consider integrating the extra questions into your study time. At the end of each day, there is a Your Turn section for personal application. These are very important. While studying our Bibles can stir our hearts and open our eyes to wonderful truths, only when we apply what we have learned will it have a lasting impact for God's kingdom. In addition to this workbook, optional video teaching sessions are available at [www.shadiahrichi.com/hagar](http://www.shadiahrichi.com/hagar).

During my study of Hagar, I often found myself fascinated by secondary topics related to the material. As such, I included a supplemental reading for each week. While they are not essential for the study, you may find them enjoyable and informative.

Before you begin, take a few moments to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you over the next seven weeks and to bless your commitment to this study. Then, as you open your Bible and your heart, begin each day with an eager expectation of *Rediscovering the God Who Sees Me*.

# GROUP STUDY TIPS

**BECAUSE ANY DEEP WORK OF GOD REQUIRES A SACRIFICE** of time spent in His Word and in His presence, the volume of material in an in-depth study can be challenging for some participants. For this reason, several suggestions are provided to help you facilitate the study when participants have varying levels of time constraints.

## **Video Teaching Sessions**

Eight optional video teaching sessions to enhance and serve as a complement to this study are available at <https://www.shadiahrichi.com/hagar>. To integrate these videos into your study, watch the Introductory Session before you begin. Then, watch Sessions One through Seven after completing each of those weeks in the study. The Introductory Session is sixteen minutes long; Sessions One through Seven are twenty to twenty-five minutes long.

## **Plan an Extended Schedule**

Rather than meeting for seven weeks, allow two weeks for each chapter, for a total of fourteen weeks. Every other week, invite participants to watch Shadia's video teaching sessions. These modifications will also provide periodic opportunities for participants to "catch up" on anything they may have missed or to spend extra time on areas of the study they may wish to explore further.

## **Customized Commitments for a Seven-Week Schedule**

Based on a seven-week format, the following are suggested assignments based on an individual's time constraints.

## For All Participants

- Read through each day's material, including the assigned Bible passages.
- Optional: read the Supplemental Reading section as provided in various weeks.

## Light (15 minutes a day)

- Complete the Your Turn personal application section at the end of each day.
- If you have time, complete the Group Discussion questions identified with a .

## Moderate (30 minutes a day)

- Complete the various Pause to Ponder personal reflection sections as well as the Your Turn personal application section at the end of each day.
- Complete the Group Discussion questions identified with a .

## In-Depth (45 minutes a day)

- Complete all questions except for the Extra questions identified with a .

## All-In (60 minutes a day)

- Complete all of the questions, including the Extra questions identified with a .
- Read all the Supplemental Reading sections.

May the Lord bless you as you journey through this study!



## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

### *AM I KNOWN? AM I LOVED? AM I HOME?*

Every human heart is searching for the answers to these questions. Yet when pain and heartache enter our lives, we feel betrayed and cry out one question: *God, do You see me?*

The answer is yes. He is Behind the Seen.

Because we live in a fallen world, each of us will inevitably face hard times, even painful ones. Who among us has never seen or felt the fallout of broken homes, broken lives, or broken dreams? Hagar is a great example of someone who discovered God during a difficult time. Maybe you have never heard of her. Or perhaps you came across her name in a study of the book of Genesis. But how much do you really know about this young slave girl? We often relegate her to the backstage as a minor character in God's redemptive story. *But was she?*

As I explored Hagar's story for another book I wanted to write, God continually amazed me as we journeyed together from the affluence of Egypt, into a life of slavery, to a desert of despair. It seemed the more I studied her life, the more I discovered about God. What began as a chapter evolved into a study all its own. Two years and several thousand hours of study and prayer later, the book you are holding came to be. Consider this your backstage pass to the life of Hagar.

I have never actually gone backstage during a live event, but I know that much more goes on behind the scenes than meets the eye. I invite you to come backstage with me and explore how God was involved in every detail of Hagar's life. Her story has all the ingredients of a Hollywood tragedy: betrayal, loss, abuse, crisis pregnancy, abandonment. . . . Does any of that sound painfully familiar?

Thankfully, Hagar's story does not end in despair. God was working Behind the Seen—just as He has in your life and mine—all along. As a matter of fact, Hagar emerges victorious! Hagar is an unsung hero if there ever was one.

Beloved, is the enemy using anything in your past to try to derail you from God's plan or to hold you back from experiencing God's joy to the fullest? Be assured that is not how your story will end. Just as God did for Hagar, when He enters your story, victory is already assured.

So strap on your sandals. We're heading into the desert. A place where we will encounter the "God Who Sees Me."

Your sister in Christ,  
Shadia

"The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone."

—Isaiah 9:2



# INTRODUCTION

**I DID NOT GROW UP GOING TO CHURCH OR READING THE** Scriptures. As a matter of fact, I was thirty years old the first time I opened a Bible. Still, somewhere along the way, I picked up a few stories, all of which I dismissed as fairy tales and wishful thinking.

What about you? Regardless of how much or how little you know about Scripture, if I asked you to name a few famous Bible stories, I suspect you would be able to name at least one or two.

Perhaps you would think of Noah. After all, a worldwide flood makes for a remarkable story. Hollywood even made a few movies about it.

Or maybe Abraham would be first on your list. His mountaintop experience is required reading in every Sunday school class.

What about Moses? A slave turned prince runs away from his Egyptian palace into a barren desert, where God speaks to him from a burning bush. That's quite a story! But while Moses's miraculous encounter is exceedingly significant, he was not the first person to have a transformational experience with God in the desert. Actually, that honor went to a woman: a lowly, Egyptian, runaway slave named Hagar.





PART I

# WOUNDED





# DISCOVERING GOD'S PRESENCE

## WEEK ONE

### **LIFE IS FULL OF DETOURS.**

This week, we will trace Hagar's origins through the story of Abraham and Sarah. As soon as the couple begins to make headway toward the Promised Land, they are diverted into Egypt, where trouble awaits. Could what appears to be a disastrous detour actually be a part of God's sovereign plan?

### **DAY ONE**

#### **Experiencing God's Presence in Life's Detours**

When I was growing up, my family moved more often than I wish to count. By my thirteenth birthday, we had moved nearly a dozen times, from the hustle and bustle of New York City, to a quiet suburb outside tourist-laden Las Vegas, to Morocco, where donkeys, cars, and camels shared the roads. Next was a rent-controlled apartment in Queens, New York, where car horns and police sirens lulled me to sleep, followed by the eerie silence of a house atop a small mountain in upstate New York. Each place we lived had a culture all its own, and no matter where we went or how hard I tried, I never seemed to fit in. I either did not look right, act right, or talk right. Or all three!

Being repeatedly uprooted, trying to make new friends only to say good-bye a year later, and never feeling settled or having a place to call home was definitely challenging. Yet, looking back, I discovered those challenges created an advantage for me rather than a handicap. I am grateful for the lessons I gained in adjusting to change, which, as time went on, came a little easier. Because I lived a year in Morocco and have parents who each immigrated to the United States and speak several languages, I feel at ease around people who are different from me, even when I do not understand what they are saying.

### PAUSE TO PONDER

How about you? Reflect on a time when you felt like you did not belong or fit in. Share one or two positive outcomes you gained from your experience. *Off*

*Record your thoughts in the margin; do this for all Pause to Ponder sections.*

### Looking Back

Before we dive into the life of Hagar, let's spend some time exploring the backstory that led up to it.

We begin this week's lesson with one of the Bible's most renowned couples: Abraham and Sarah. Like many other stories from Scripture, it opens with God calling people out of their comfort zone. Ten generations and 367 years after the famous worldwide flood, a man named Abraham received a divine message from God. (Actually, his name was Abram at the time, and God later changed it to Abraham. God also changed Abraham's wife's name from Sarai to Sarah. To avoid confusion, I'm going to use Abraham and Sarah throughout this study, except in Scripture quotations that use the older versions of their names.)

Learn about Abraham's background by reading Joshua 24:1-3. What word best describes Abraham's father? Circle one.

shepherd   idolater   priest   elder   warrior

Does Abraham's upbringing surprise you? Why or why not?

Read Genesis 12:1–9. Which of the following statements best reflects Abraham's response to God's command?

He obeyed after receiving his wife's approval.

He waited for a more convenient time to travel.

He obeyed and went.

### PAUSE TO PONDER

Think about a time when God asked you to step out in faith.

What was your initial response?

Were you hesitant? Expectant? Resistant?

Why do you suppose you responded the way you did?

Did God ask you to leave someone or something behind?

In what ways did the experience shape your relationship with God?

Genesis 12:1 really bothers me: "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.'" I do not know about you, but I like to know where I am going. For me, it is hard enough being directionally challenged without the added problem of not knowing where I am supposed to end up.

I get lost. *A lot*. My close friends know this and graciously cover me in prayer whenever I travel. The Bible teaches that God determines the time and place each of us is born (Acts 17:26). I wonder if He waited until the invention of GPS before sending me into the world.

I once remember driving with a new friend to a large park where we were planning to walk the trails. Within minutes of fastening our seat belts, I realized my friend was just as devoid of an internal compass as I was. This was a couple of years before smartphones, so neither of us had GPS on our cell phones. We could have printed out a map from the Internet, but because I had lived in the area for over twelve years, I did not think we needed one. I was wrong. For nearly forty-five minutes, we drove in circles, trying to find the park.

Exasperated, I called my friend Liz who was familiar with the area and my tendency to get lost. I could imagine her shaking her head as she recited the directions. When my friend and I arrived at the park, we realized it had been practically a stone's throw away the entire time we were driving. To this day, I still



get lost and am often asked, “Why don’t you use your phone’s GPS?” To which I reply, “I do—once I realize I’m lost.” Something about data and dollars and . . . sigh.

## Walking by Faith

Abraham had no idea where he was going when God told him to leave. He had to trust God to lead him every step of the way. Talk about walking by faith!

Glance back at Genesis 12:4–8.

List each of the family members Abraham took with him.

What else did Abraham take with him when he set out for Canaan?

Read Genesis 11:30. What additional detail do we learn here?

Describe the location where Abraham called on the name of the Lord.  
Be specific.

Considering Abraham’s family background, how much significance would you ascribe to Abraham’s decision to call on the name of the LORD in Genesis 12:8? Place an X on the line to indicate your response.

not very significant \_\_\_\_\_ very significant

 Explain your response.

In Joshua 24:3, Scripture teaches us that God Himself took “Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan.” Think back to the first time you sensed in your heart a longing for God. Do you believe God guided your steps to reach that point? Explain.

“The heart of man plans  
his way, but the LORD  
establishes his steps.”

—Proverbs 16:9

In John 6:44, Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." Take a few moments to meditate on that thought. Reflect on your own journey with God up to this point. Where would you place an X on the line?

I went looking for God \_\_\_\_\_ God came looking for me

Over the past week, how often did you call on the name of the Lord?

In my set daily prayer time

Whenever I needed something

Throughout the day

Only when I blew it

## An Unexpected Detour

When God asked Abraham to leave nearly everything that was familiar to him, Abraham and Sarah packed up their little family and began the journey. However, just as they were starting to make some headway, the couple found themselves having to take a detour.

Read Genesis 12:10-16. Briefly summarize the events in your own words.

While Abraham was wise to take steps to protect his family from starvation, in fear for his life, he failed to protect his wife from the hungry eyes of Pharaoh. The servants of Pharaoh were so taken by Sarah's beauty (even at age sixty-five!) that when they told Pharaoh about her, he took Sarah into his home.

Read Genesis 12:17-20. What did God do and why?

What Pharaoh didn't know (in addition to Sarah being Abraham's wife) was that God's promise to Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation," was, by extension, also a promise to Sarah. And God's promise would not be thwarted.

 Why do you suppose God stepped on to the scene in regard to Sarah, but He did not intervene to prevent the famine that drove her and Abraham into Egypt in the first place?

## Coming Full Circle

Read Genesis 13:1–4; then answer the questions that follow.

Describe the place where Abraham built an altar and “called upon the name of the LORD” after departing Egypt.

.....

“The times we find ourselves having to wait on others may be the perfect opportunities to train ourselves to wait on the Lord.” —Joni Eareckson Tada, a quadriplegic and award-winning Christian author<sup>1</sup>

.....

 Does this place sound familiar? (Hint: Glance back at page 22.) What conclusions can you draw?

Except for the sovereignty of God, the trip to Egypt would seem like nothing more than a temporary detour since, from there, Abraham journeys right back to where he started. Let’s see if perhaps there is more to this story than taking an off-ramp to stop for dinner and load up on snacks.

.....Your Turn .....

Sometime today or tomorrow, read Genesis 16 all the way through to gain an overview as we embark further on our journey with God Behind the Seen.

## DAY TWO

### Doubting God’s Presence

### When Your World Doesn’t Make Sense

Years ago, while I was living in upstate New York, I had a cute, red Miata convertible with a removable hard top. One unseasonably warm spring day, I wanted to drive with the top down, but no one was at home to help me remove the heavy top. So I decided to do it myself. I unlatched the hinges and lifted the hard top a few inches. When my legs started shaking, I turned the top toward myself. I watched, helpless, as the metal corner screeched down the left rear panel of my car, tearing through the shiny red paint from top to bottom. I finally wrestled the top onto the driveway and then turned around to survey the damage. My heart sank as I gazed at the ugly, jagged scar on my beautiful little car.

## PAUSE TO PONDER

Have you ever become impatient waiting for something or someone, perhaps even God, and decided to take matters into your own hands? What were the results? *effs*

### The Offer

Read Genesis 15:1-6. What did Abraham long for?

Scripture clearly states, not once but twice, that Abraham was childless (verses 2 and 3). Take a few moments to meditate on Abraham's words: "Oh Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless. . . . You have given me no offspring."

Is there anything you long for (or have longed for) so much that, even if you were to be given everything else, it would not be enough? How can you relate to Abraham's heartache?

While we do not have the time to trace all the details of Abraham's life to this point, Scripture reveals that Abraham was quite favored. He had position, possessions, a beautiful wife, freedom, and God's personal blessing. But Abraham's heart ached for one thing above all else: a son. Yet God, who is all-powerful and who could give Abraham anything, chose first to offer Himself.

Write down what God said to Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 15:1.

Whenever God asks us to leave behind anything or anyone, resulting in a perceived loss, it is because He wants to satisfy our longings with something infinitely better: His presence.

Read Ruth 2:11-12. Compare "shield" in Genesis 15:1 and "wings" in Ruth 2:12. What (or whom) do each of these images point to?

 What other parallels can you discover between Ruth and Abraham?

## PAUSE TO PONDER

Why might God want us to desire a relationship with Him first, above all other desires of our hearts?

Consider your deepest longing. What if, in the end, God chooses not to grant your request?  
Will you still be able to trust His plan for your life?

### Refuse to Settle for Second-Best

God longs to give us the very best, which means God wants us to seek Him first. After God delivered Abraham's enemies into his hands (Gen. 14), He came to Abraham in a vision and said, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." In the original Hebrew, the sentence structure of Genesis 15:1 creates a parallel between the words "reward" and "shield."<sup>2</sup> Whereas Abraham was looking for an earthly reward of a son (a worthy desire implanted by God Himself; see Gen. 1:28), God's promise here points to something exceedingly higher: the presence of God Himself (both in this life as our "shield" and into the next as our "reward"). When we seek Him first, not only will we experience the greatest relationship we could ever imagine, but He will also guard us against our own destructive tendency toward idolatry (placing something or someone, even one's own self, above God).

According to Abraham, who is at fault for Abraham being childless?

Abraham presumed that a servant, rather than a beloved son, would be his only heir. Then God told Abraham he would indeed have a son; more than that, he would have descendants too numerous to count. This is where God commends Abraham's faith: Abraham "believed the LORD" and God "counted" his faith as righteousness.

Describe several ways people try to earn God's favor by their own efforts.



 Read Galatians 3:8. According to Galatians 3:8 and Genesis 15:6, what must precede righteousness (or justification)?

The word translated “justify” in Galatians 3:8 is *dikaio* in Greek. It is the same root word used throughout the New Testament for “righteousness” and can also be translated “declared [or made] righteous.”<sup>3</sup>

### PAUSE TO PONDER

How about you? Are you trying (or have you tried in the past) to earn God’s favor—perhaps by investing more time in serving Him than in deepening your relationship with Him? If so, ask God to help you identify any false beliefs about Him that might be hidden in your heart. Record what God reveals to you.

### Shifting Gears

As on any journey, sometimes we can coast through the valleys, and other times we need to climb some hills. In order to navigate the difficult terrain, we need to be prepared to temporarily shift gears. This is one of those times. We are about to tackle a small hill. Are you ready? Let’s go.

List each group of possessions Abraham had accumulated while living in Egypt, in the order presented in the text. I listed the first one to get you started.

Sheep \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

.....  
 “And for her sake he dealt  
 well with Abram; and he  
 had sheep, oxen, male  
 donkeys, male servants,  
 female servants, female  
 donkeys, and camels.”  
 —Genesis 12:16  
 .....

Take a few moments to examine this list. Record anything that strikes you as unusual.

Glance back to page 22 where you recorded everything Abraham took with him when he set out for Canaan. In addition to his family, what else did Abraham take with him?

Did you notice a difference in how the author describes what Abraham had with him in each case? In Genesis 12:5, the author simply writes that Abraham took “all their possessions . . . and the people they had acquired.” However, the same author goes into far greater detail in Genesis 12:16 to list basically the same things. Nothing in Scripture is random. When something seems unusual, it is good to ask why. God’s Word is like a treasure hunt. If we ask questions and do some research, we are bound to discover beautiful nuggets of insight.

In the Bible, the structure of the text can often provide tremendous insight into what the author wanted to emphasize. Did you notice in Genesis 12:16 that the only animals distinguished as male and female were the donkeys? I found that curious, so I did some digging. It turns out there are more than sixty references to the plural form of donkeys in the Bible. However, besides Genesis 12:16, there are only four instances where donkeys are distinguished as male and female. In each of the other four instances, the animals represent either an elaborate gift (Gen. 32:15 and 45:23) or God’s blessing (Job 1:3 and 42:12), and the author always includes the exact number of animals, such as “twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys.”

When we take into account this scriptural pattern, along with Pharaoh’s favor toward Abraham in Genesis 12:16, it seems likely that this list does, in fact, represent an elaborate gift given to Abraham by Egypt’s wealthy ruler. However, in contrast to similar verses, in Genesis 12:16 this same author leaves out the number of animals. So why not simply say “donkeys,” as he did with the sheep, oxen, and camels? Not only did the author separate the male and female donkeys, but he did not list them consecutively. Elsewhere in the Bible, the more valuable items, such as people, are often listed last (regardless of quantity), as in Genesis 32:5: “I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants.” Given the curious arrangement in Genesis 12, it seems the author is drawing our attention to something about this list.

A literary pattern called chiastic structure is common in Scripture, whereby the author intersects mirror images of words, concepts, or events in order to draw the reader's attention to what the author wants to emphasize. To help readers see the pattern, biblical scholars typically use pairs of letters (such as A with A<sup>1</sup>, B with B<sup>1</sup>) to identify parallel words, phrases, or concepts when outlining a chiastic structure. Let's take a look at Genesis 12:16 by outlining the verse in this structure. (Note: I have added a general description after each item in the list in parentheses for further clarification.)

- A Sheep, oxen (animals, general)
- B Male donkeys (donkeys, gender specific)
- C Male servants (human servants, gender specific)
- C<sup>1</sup> Female servants (human servants, gender specific)
- B<sup>1</sup> Female donkeys (donkeys, gender specific)
- A<sup>1</sup> Camels (animals, general)

Notice how the object (animals, general) in line A is similar to that in line A<sup>1</sup> (animals, general). The same is true for B and B<sup>1</sup> (donkeys, gender specific), and C and C<sup>1</sup> (human servants, gender specific). The author's goal is to draw our attention to the point where the parallels intersect.

Now, if the author had merely listed the people in the middle, it would be unusual, but not necessarily unique. However, he does more than that. The male and female slaves are sandwiched between male and female donkeys. Now that is a strange arrangement. As a matter of fact, nowhere else in the entire Bible does that arrangement appear. Why is that significant? Hang on. We're getting there.

Read Genesis 16:1. What fact does the author repeat? (If you do not recall, glance back at Genesis 11:30.)

All of a sudden, Hagar appears on the scene. Where did she come from? The Bible offers no information about Hagar except for introducing her as an Egyptian slave girl belonging to Sarah, Abraham's wife. Because Genesis 12:5 tells us that Abraham had people and possessions in Haran, we can only wonder if Abraham and Sarah acquired Hagar while they were in Egypt. However, considering her ethnic origins, Abraham and Sarah's detour into Egypt, and all that we just gleaned from Genesis 12:16, I do not believe the author is leaving us to guess. You might be starting to wonder if *I* am taking *you* on a curious detour.

Recall from yesterday's lesson the events that led Abraham and Sarah into Egypt. When they left, taking hordes of animals and slaves with them, they traveled right back to where they started. Only then could Abraham resume his original course in response to God's call, "Go . . . to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1).

Could it be that God was watching over Hagar and that He decided to remove her from Egypt and its pagan gods? Might He have orchestrated Abraham's side trip into Egypt, not because God needed to send Abraham and Sarah in, but because God desired to bring Hagar out?

This, my friend, is the wonderful sovereignty of God at work Behind the Seen.

.....Your Turn .....

Think of a time you experienced a detour in your life. Looking back, are you able to see how God was working Behind the Seen in your situation? If so, complete the following sentence.

When I was \_\_\_\_\_ [approximate age(s)], I experienced a detour  
when \_\_\_\_\_ [describe the  
situation]. But God \_\_\_\_\_  
[describe how God revealed Himself, or protected or comforted you, or used the  
events for good].

If you are unable to recognize God's presence in the situation, spend some time this week in prayer and ask God to help you see the ways He intervened or used the situation to accomplish something positive. Perhaps He has enabled you to have compassion for others in a similar situation. When you are ready, go back and complete the fill-in sentence as God enables you. (Note: There are a total of six fill-in questions of this kind throughout this study. These questions are important, as we will refer back to them when we near the end of our study.)

## DAY THREE

### Dismissing God's Presence as You Grasp for Control

Read Genesis 16:2-4. What was Sarah's complaint?