



I think that all the problems in our lives come about when we think we have certain things that we can handle without God. **What if we lived our lives as if we are dependent on God for everything? (Because we are!) What if we really believed that apart from faith/dependence/reliance, it is impossible to please God? What if God wants us to actually live and walk by faith always? (Which he does).** I think we can test this in our own lives right now. Just ask yourself how many things you assume you can do on your own, without God's help. How do you practically live in a day? Take a few moments right now to write down the practical ways you live without God's help?

Now that you've done that, what's the response to this? How ought we to live? What does it look like to walk and live by faith? Well, I think as we've been going through the life of Abram, we see God unveiling lesson after lesson of what living by faith looks like. As we enter into Genesis 16, I think we're reminded again of a Psalm that applies to this text: Psalm 37. We read that a month or so ago, and it's a good reminder to have before us today: ³**Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.** ⁴**Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.** ⁸**Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.**¹

We who trust Jesus for our life and hope and salvation; we who trust Jesus as our Lord and believe that he reigns and is coming again; we aren't to live in fear because it tends only to evil. Instead, we are to trust the Lord, do good, live fully in this life and be faithful to him in all we do. These are easy words to say, but absolutely impossible to live out if we aren't looking to the Lord first. If we don't trust the Lord, there will be no doing good, no dwelling in the land, no befriending faithfulness and we will absolutely live in fear. This is actually what we see in Genesis 16. We see Abram and Sarai revert back to faithlessness, and then we see them abuse someone else and live on the basis of fear instead of faith. But that very person they abuse becomes a testimony of faith – a testimony that Abram and Sarai ought to learn from. And, I would say that this is a testimony that not only the wandering Israelites should learn from, but we ought to learn from as well because it's a testimony that points to the power and goodness of the Lord himself.

With all this understanding, the main idea of the sermon today is: **Believers should pray to and submit to the Lord who fulfills his promises.** This is what trusting practically looks like, leading us away from living by fear and towards dwelling in the land and befriending faithfulness. This is what the Lord teaches Abram, Sarai, Hagar, the Israelites who are the original audience of this writing, and to us. So, without further ado, let's jump right into the sermon:

1. Believers should. . . (vv. 1-6)

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 37:3-4, 8.

Let's read verses 1-6 to get some context: Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. 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. ³ 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. 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. 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!" 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. ²

If you were here last week, you heard what took place in chapter 15. Abram expresses his questions to the Lord. Will the Lord give him a biological child or will Abram have to go to a servant? Will the Lord give his family a home or not? God reiterates his promises and through a covenant ceremony essentially states that if he doesn't hold up his promises, he deserves to die. And God affirms that *he will* do this because it'll be impossible for Abram to ensure that these things will happen. Abram can't make his wife get pregnant. Abram can't ensure he gets land for his family. Then we enter into chapter 16. We read, "Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. . . ." The word "now" doesn't mean that this takes place immediately after chapter 15. It's just saying that at some point in time comes chapter 16's situation.

So, what's happening here? Sarai hasn't gotten pregnant. They've been in Canaan a total of ten years. God promised a child. Where is it? Have you ever had situations in your life where you feel stuck between a rock and a hard place? Situations where you know what God says, but it seems like you *have* to do something, but there's no real good option? Where is God? Why isn't he fulfilling his promise right now. I mean, ten years is a long time. Plus, based on Abram's stated age at the end of this chapter, we can know that Sarai is in her 70's. Things aren't looking promising at all that she's going to have a biological child. What are they to do? We hear Sarai's words and Abram's response to them in verse 2: "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.³ Right now, we all want to shake our heads and say, "NOOOOO!" But instead of looking over them in judgment, what if you thought about how you behaved in circumstances like this? Yes, they're wrong. But this scenario is to reveal our own hearts, too. When we are confused about life, we often try to merge God's promises with our schemes and we then try to justify ourselves into thinking we're actually obeying God.

This is what Sarai is doing here. You may say, "What a weird and horrible solution." And it is. Yet, at the same time, there are different ancient cultures that acknowledged this practice. If a wife couldn't give birth, the husband could have a child with the servant, but that child would be raised in the name of the husband and wife. Now, before you say, "Oh, this was culturally ok; so, it's ok for Abram and Sarai to do this," I want you to think of all the things our culture embraces that we also would say, "No way, that's not ok for a Christian to behave." Just because the culture says "yes," doesn't mean the believer does so. Yet, Sarai, in her desperation thinks it's ok to turn to her own schemes and to cultural norms. And, all the more sadly, Abram assents to this.

I say "all the more sadly" because Abram is the one who heard God directly in the covenant, promising a child. He should have led Sarai here to greater trust in the Lord's Word, but he doesn't. This scenario

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 16:1-6.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 16:2.

sounds oddly familiar to Adam and Eve, doesn't it? We actually should think of Adam and Eve because of how the author writes words similar in this text as he did in the temptation of Eve in the garden. Instead of Abram leading his wife, he listens to a sinful suggestion (like Adam does with Eve), and then just like Eve took the fruit and gave it to Adam; so Sarai takes her maidservant and gives her to Abram. Clearly, this was never God's intention, and this is a lack of faith – which leads to using and abusing someone.

Instead of "Fret not yourself," Sarai and Abram live on the basis of fear – and it has led to evil. Instead of trusting in the Lord, doing good, dwelling in the land and befriending faithfulness; they are trusting themselves, doing evil, living in anxiety in their lives and befriending unrighteousness. Yet, probably in their own minds they were thinking, "We're just trying to figure out what God wants." And, I think they might have been thinking that because Sarai's assessment is that God is preventing her from having children. So, clearly, in her mind, God has a different way of giving Abram offspring. Oh how quickly we can make assumptions about God in order to speed up the process of things. We humans long for efficiency and speed. God loves to call us to *wait*. In waiting, God is fostering our trust in him. God often doesn't work in *speedy* forms because he's not simply interested in giving us things. He is interested in us knowing *him*.

But Sarai and Abram trust themselves. They forsake God's way for their own ways. And just like Abram's panic when there was a famine in the land, and he went to Egypt; so Sarai forsakes God's ways and it leads to more problems and complications.

Read verses 4-6 again with me: 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. 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!" 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. ⁴

Hagar gets pregnant, and after getting pregnant looks on contempt on Sarai. This word for contempt is actually a very strong term in the Hebrew. Hagar has elevated herself in her own mind over Sarai to have an attitude of condemnation over Sarai. She thinks she's better than Sarai because she got pregnant.

This isn't what Sarai thought would happen. But then again, whenever we trust ourselves and justify sin, we never think it's going to take us as far as it does, right? So then Sarai confronts Abram and says that the wrong done to her is on Abram! He's responsible. Then she calls on the Lord to judge between her and Abram.

Right here, I feel like I'm watching one of those crazy TLC programs where you are left in shock and disgust that people actually live and think this way. I want to say to Sarai, "Are you kidding me?! You came up with this plan in the first place. Now you're shifting blame to Abram?" Oh wait. That's what humans have done from the beginning. Isn't that what Adam and Eve did? So here. We love to blame-shift to try to get out of the consequences of our sin and make us feel better than ourselves. If we can make someone else more guilty than we are, then we can just say we're not guilty. But is that true? No. Are you living that way right now? Maybe there are marital issues and you're behaving this way. Or, maybe it's at work or between family members. Ask yourself if you're trusting your own schemes and then seeking to defend yourself or live by faith in God.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 16:4–6.

So, how does Abram respond? He doesn't respond by saying, "You're right. I am ultimately responsible as the husband and the one to whom God gave the covenant. I should have stopped this." Nope. He blameshifts and puts everything back in Sarai's hands. (Side note: even though Sarai is the one concocted the plan doesn't mean that Abram was free from responsibility. This is good for people to remember in the midst of arguments. Just because someone else might seem more guilty doesn't mean you aren't. Humility and turning from sin is always the right path). But Abram just says to Sarai, "She's your servant. Do whatever you want with her." Which is Abram saying, "She's not my wife. She's your servant. Have at her." Oh how horrifying the statement. Psalm 37 says "Fret not yourself. It tends only to evil." And here we see the evil that results. At the end of verse 6 we're told that Sarai deals harshly with her. This word for "harshly" actually is used of Egypt's treatment of the Israelites as slaves. Hagar's harsh attitude towards Sarai has turned to Sarai's even harsher treatment in return.

As I think of this, I can't help but be reminded of God's word to Abram that through him all the nations will be blessed – and the exact opposite is happening here. Hagar is an Egyptian, who probably came with Abram and Sarai when they left Egypt during the famine. Hagar, who should have been blessed through Abram and Sarai is used and abused by them because, instead of trusting the Lord, they trusted their plans. And now Hagar is abused, not blessed. So, Hagar flees in a desert area. As the Israelites read this narrative, they ought to relate to Hagar. Even though she's an Egyptian, she's suffering under the hands of the father and mother of Israel. And so, just like the Israelites fled Egypt and cried out because of their affliction; Hagar flees from her affliction. But then, what happens next is shocking and beautifully comforting. God works in Hagar's life to lead her to submit to the Lord – and that takes us to the second point:

2. Believers should pray to and submit to the Lord who fulfills his promises (vv. 7-12)

Hagar flees. Sarai and Abram have sinned against the Lord. Evil has wreaked havoc. Now what? Well, as we learned from the beginning of Genesis, God is the God who brings order from chaos. As we learned last week, the covenant God makes with Abram isn't based on Abram's ability or inability. It's not based on Abram's obedience. It's based on God. God will keep his promise. And so, in such glorious beauty, God shows up – not to Abram and Sarai first, but to Hagar. Let's read verses 7-12: ⁷The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. ⁸And 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." ⁹The angel of the Lord said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." ¹⁰The angel of the Lord also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." ¹¹And the angel of the Lord said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the Lord has listened to your affliction. ¹²He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." ⁵

The angel of the Lord found Hagar by a spring of water in the wilderness. Who is this angel of the Lord? I believe this is God himself – specifically God the Son. I'm not going to go into all the reasons why I believe this. If you want to know more, go to Ventura's website and search for the sermon "The Angel of the Lord Come in the Flesh." That sermon goes into more detail. All I'll say here is that whenever *the* angel of the Lord shows up, people worship that angel and we're told when the angel of the Lord reveals himself, God is revealing himself. This isn't simply *an* angel. This is *the* angel of the Lord. And Hagar knows that this messenger is God himself because we see her response to him.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 16:7–12.

But notice how the Lord draws Hagar out. He asks where she has come from and where she's going. She responds that she's fleeing from Sarai. Then comes an absolutely shocking statement: The angel of the Lord tells her to return to Sarai. Are you kidding me?! That's insane. But then Hagar is given promises of comfort that would compel her to submit to the Lord's word. He says that she's going to have much offspring as well, and that the Lord has listened to her affliction. Notice that the Lord doesn't downplay her pain. He doesn't say, "You slept with Abram. You deserved to have this pain." No. Sin always victimizes and we should hate that. And Sarai was sinning. But the Lord has heard Hagar – which I imagine causes Hagar to believe that the Lord will take care of her if she goes back. Finally, the Lord prophecies about her son that he's going to be a wild donkey of a man. The prophecy is essentially saying he's going to live away from certain people groups and will have to fight to have his own territories.

In all that the Lord says to Hagar, he affirms he sees her and has heard her and therefore, he cares for her. As a result, he tells Hagar to name her son "Ishmael," which means "God hears." Why is this so important? Through the angel of the Lord's interaction with Hagar, I believe he's confronting Abram and Sarai on what they ought to have done. The Lord hears us in our affliction. The Lord sees us in our pain. The Lord comforts in our suffering. Will we pray to him? Will we cry out to him? Will we trust him? Or, will we simply judge God on the basis of our circumstances? Remember, that's what Sarai did. She said that God has prevented her from getting pregnant; so, instead of trusting and praying, she schemes. What about you? Do you know God sees you, hears you, and he can comfort you?

But you might say, "Well, my circumstances haven't changed!" But neither did Hagar's. Hagar didn't get a change of circumstances. But she did get a vision of God, and that vision of God melted her heart and led her to genuinely trust him. And that trust is revealed through her submission. She went back to the very person and place she was fleeing from. This isn't because she trusted Sarai was so good. It's because she trusted the Lord.

Oh how important this is all to remember. We humans can hurt others and be hurt by others. I know I've hurt through my actions, and it burdens me to think about that. And I've also been very hurt by others. Sometimes I wonder, "Why do I keep going into relationships with people when there's so much hurt? I don't trust people!" Well, do I trust God? Do you trust God works through weak, frail people to accomplish his plan? Do you trust God sees you, hears you, and can comfort you? Then pray and submit to him – whatever he calls you to do. Trust the Lord. Do good. Dwell in the land. Befriend faithfulness. Fret not yourself. It tends only to evil. Delight in the Lord! This is what we see with Hagar. She trusts the Lord, and this now leads us to the application.

Application. Let's read verses 13-16: ¹³ 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." ¹⁴ Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. ¹⁵ And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram. ⁶

The word "So" in verse 13 tells us the conclusion of this interaction. This is Hagar's response, which ought to be Abram and Sarai's response. She claims that the angel of the Lord is actually the Lord who spoke to her. And she says that God is the God of seeing. By the way, this is the only time in all of Scripture, and in all ancient near eastern literature where a human being names a divine being. How precious that this afflicted, rejected, abused woman is recorded to have declared a name of the Lord!

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 16:13–16.

The Lord seeing Hagar settles her heart. Isn't that what we ultimately long for? We don't just want people to notice us. We want to be seen. We want to be known – and even in all of our ugliness and pain, we want a love that pursues us and doesn't afflict us. The Lord sees Hagar. She's known and loved by the Lord and that settles her heart. Even though she could say, "Why did you let Abram do that to me" or "Why won't you stop my son from being a wild donkey?" No. Those questions aren't for her to know the answer. Just like it wasn't for Sarai to know when she'd get pregnant. Just like it's not for you to know the answers to many of the questions that lead you to fear. Instead, knowing the Lord sees her settles her. What about you?

Hagar maintains a reminder of God's seeing. Then we're told she names a well out in the wilderness. The well means, "Belonging to the Lord, the seeing One." She belongs to the Lord! If God sees her and she belongs to him, she's taken care of! His eyes are always on her. She doesn't trust Abram. She trusts the Lord. And this well is a continual reminder.

Abram names her son. Do you notice this? Abram names him Ishmael. This must mean that Hagar told Abram what took place. And, I imagine Abram and Sarai would always have a reminder of their need to trust, pray, and submit to the Lord, because the name Ishmael means "God hears." The next time Abram and Sarai are tempted to trust their own understanding, they ought to pray because God hears and sees them, too! Fret not. It tends only to evil.

So, what is the **implication to us**? How does this apply to us? Well, in Galatians 4, we read about Sarai and Hagar, and we're told that all of humanity is either allegorically either of the child of Hagar or the offspring of Sarai. Meaning, we're either living in bondage to fear or living by faith in Jesus, who came from Sarai's lineage. If we look at Jesus' life, it's intriguing to me how there's one story that is kind of similar to Hagar. It's a story about a woman at the well. She was used by men, too. She's out by a well, and she longed to be seen. And Jesus, like the angel of the Lord, but now in human flesh, saw her. And there, at that well, Jesus revealed who he is. He's the One who rescues people from their afflictions to sin, and he will restore everything someday and bring God's peace to the world. She was so amazed by Jesus that she went back to the town and became an evangelist for Jesus in her town!

Jesus frees the Hagar's of this world. Jesus frees the children of Hagar, like us, from our afflictions. How? He was afflicted with our afflictions. Earlier in the service, we read from Psalm 34, and we skipped over some verses. I want to share one we skipped over: ¹⁹ **Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.** ²⁰ **He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.**⁷ In the New Testament, we're told that verse 20 was fulfilled at the cross of Jesus. Not one of his bones were broken on the cross. Jesus, on the cross, took the affliction of sin by becoming sin and taking the just punishment sinners deserved. But God kept him. And even though he went to the grave, he conquered death on the third day, rose from the dead and now promises his righteousness to *any* who will turn from their sins to him for reconciliation with God. He sets us free from the affliction. And if he lived, died and rose again for us, how much more will he take care of us now? **Have you trusted him? And if you have, are you trusting him? Trust is the ongoing reality of the believer. Are you living in fear or in faith? Are you praying and submitting? Do you know your God sees, hears, and comforts? He fulfills all his promises.**

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 34:19–20.