

DISCERNMENT: A Spiritual Discipline
Where is God when it all goes wrong?

Genesis 16 Hagar and the Ishmaelites' origins

1 Sarai, Abram's wife, had not been able to have children. Since she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar, 2 Sarai said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from giving birth, so go to my servant. Maybe she will provide me with children." Abram did just as Sarai said. 3 After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took her Egyptian servant Hagar and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. 4 He slept with Hagar, and she became pregnant. But when she realized that she was pregnant, she no longer respected her mistress. 5 Sarai said to Abram, "This harassment is your fault. I allowed you to embrace my servant, but when she realized she was pregnant, I lost her respect. Let the LORD decide who is right, you or me." 6 Abram said to Sarai, "Since she's your servant, do whatever you wish to her." So Sarai treated her harshly, and she ran away from Sarai.

7 The LORD's messenger found Hagar at a spring in the desert, the spring on the road to Shur, 8 and said, "Hagar! Sarai's servant! Where did you come from and where are you going?" She said, "From Sarai my mistress. I'm running away." 9 The LORD's messenger said to her, "Go back to your mistress. Put up with her harsh treatment of you." 10 The LORD's messenger also said to her, "I will give you many children, so many they can't be counted!" 11 The LORD's messenger said to her, "You are now pregnant and will give birth to a son. You will name him Ishmael because the LORD has heard about your harsh treatment. 12 He will be a wild mule of a man; he will fight everyone, and they will fight him. He will live at odds with all his relatives." 13 Hagar named the LORD who spoke to her, "You are El Roi" because she said, "Can I still see after he saw me?" 14 Therefore, that well is called Beer-lahai-roi; it's the well between Kadesh and Bered. 15 Hagar gave birth to a son for Abram, and Abram named him Ishmael. 16 Abram was 86 years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael for Abram.

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Genesis 21 Hagar and Ishmael evicted

8 The boy grew and stopped nursing. On the day he stopped nursing, Abraham prepared a huge banquet. 9 Sarah saw Hagar's son laughing, the one Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham. 10 So she said to Abraham, "Send this servant away with her son! This servant's son won't share the inheritance with my son Isaac." 11 This upset Abraham terribly because the boy was his son. 12 God said to Abraham, "Don't be upset about the boy and your servant. Do everything Sarah tells you to do because your descendants will be traced through Isaac. 13 But I will make of your servant's son a great nation too, because he is also your descendant." 14 Abraham got up early in the morning, took some bread and a flask of water, and gave it to Hagar. He put the boy in her shoulder sling and sent her away. She left and wandered through the desert near Beer-sheba. 15 Finally the water in the flask ran out, and she put the boy down under one of the desert shrubs. 16 She walked away from him about as far as a bow shot and sat down, telling herself, I can't bear to see the boy die. She sat at a distance, cried out in grief, and wept. 17 God heard the boy's cries, and God's messenger called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "Hagar! What's wrong? Don't be afraid. God has heard the boy's cries over there. 18 Get up, pick up the boy, and take him by the hand because I will make of him a great nation." 19 Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well. She went over, filled the water flask, and gave the boy a drink. 20 God remained with the boy; he grew up, lived in the desert, and became an expert archer. 21 He lived in the Paran desert, and his mother found him an Egyptian wife.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What does the word "sin" mean to you? What about the word "vulnerability?"
- 2) How do you wrestle with the "Prosperity Gospel?" Is God's blessing reflected in material wealth? If not, how do we see God's blessing?
- 3) Have you ever been noticed God's presence in a difficult situation? What does this say about God's call in your life?