

DESPERATE FOR GOD TO MOVE

A few weeks ago, we began a new series called "Desperate for God to Move." Throughout this series, we're reading various stories in the Bible about people who were desperate for God to move in their lives. Last week, we considered what it means to be desperate for God in the midst of uncertainty. Today, we're going to turn toward the personal. We're considering what it means to be "Desperate for God to Move in My Family." Many in our church are desperate for God to move in their families. It may be with one of their children, a parent, a marriage, or another aspect of family life. Something about family desperation leads us to respond in unhealthy ways. The pain is so close and personal we're often driven to make regrettable choices. Today, we'll see two ways to handle things when we get desperate in our families.

Key Passage: Genesis 16

Discussion Questions:

1. What was the central issue that caused desperation for Abram and Sarai in Genesis 16? How did Sarai propose to solve their problem of infertility, and what was the outcome?

The central issue was infertility. Sarai was unable to bear children, which led to a desperate situation where she and Abram took matters into their own hands rather than waiting on God's promise. Sarai proposed that Abram sleep with her Egyptian servant, Hagar, to have a child through her. The outcome was that Hagar conceived, leading to tension and resentment between Sarai and Hagar.

2. What does this story teach us about the consequences of taking matters into our own hands? How does desperation affect our decision-making?

The story illustrates that taking matters into our own hands, especially in desperation, often leads to negative consequences, such as broken relationships, conflict, and desperation. Desperation can cloud judgment and lead to poor decisions. In the case of Sarai and Abram, their desperation led them to make a choice outside of God's will, resulting in conflict and hardship.

3. What is the significance of Hagar's encounter with the angel of the Lord in the desert? What name did Hagar give to God after her encounter? What does this name mean?

Hagar's encounter with the angel is significant because it shows that even in her lowest and most vulnerable moment, God saw her, heard her cries, and provided her with promises for her future, demonstrating His care and attention. Hagar called God "El Roi," which means "the God who sees me." This name reflects her realization that God was aware of her situation and cared for her.

4. What lesson can we learn from Abram and Sarai's decision to act out of desperation rather than faith?

In a moment of desperation, have you ever had these thoughts: "Why isn't God *doing* something?" "Does He not *see* me?" "Why is He not *listening*?" "Does He not know how *miserable* I am?" If we're honest, the answer is yes. We've all had these thoughts or similar thoughts at some time. Now, answer this: How many of us have taken it further and moved from thinking it to acting wrongly upon those thoughts? If we're not careful, we can easily stumble into stupidity when desperate.

The lesson from Abram and Sarai's decision is that acting out of desperation rather than waiting on God's timing and promises can lead to unnecessary complications and suffering. It emphasizes the importance of trusting God even when circumstances seem difficult.

5. How does the story of Hagar and Ishmael relate to the historical tension between Judaism and Islam?

Abram, who will eventually be called Abraham, is known as the Father of Israel. In today's passage, Abram goes outside God's ways and fathers a son named Ishmael. That said, today's story relates to the broader historical tension as Ishmael, Hagar's son, is considered the ancestor of the Arabs. In contrast, Isaac, the son of Abram and Sarai (later named Abraham and Sarah), is the ancestor of the Jews. The tension between these two lineages has had significant historical implications, particularly in the conflict between Islam and Judaism. Allen P. Ross notes, "There is no problem seeing what went wrong in the dark side of the story. When the way of faith (which involves patient waiting) was abandoned and the way of human calculation was taken, Abram was caught up in a chain of causes and effects that would trouble him for years to come. (Ishmael became the ancestor of the Arabs, who are still hostile to the Jews)."

6. What message does the story of Hagar teach us about God's character?

Abram and Sarai's desperation led them to make wrong, sinful choices that, as a result, put Hagar in a desperate situation – alone and pregnant. Many people face desperation because someone else sinned against them. They had no choice in the matter, and they're left wondering if God sees them. At rock bottom in her life, Hagar found the real Rock...God Himself. She called Him a God who has seen her in the midst of her trouble and her grief. Today's passage conveys that God is compassionate and attentive to the suffering of individuals, even those who are marginalized or in difficult circumstances. He sees and cares for people in their moments of desperation. He is attracted to weakness and drawn to vulnerability. Isaiah writes that God is with the lowly in spirit and can revive our hearts and souls.

7. What practical steps can we take to avoid making desperate decisions in difficult family situations?

When we face a desperate situation, we need to trust in God's timing, seek His guidance through prayer, avoid impulsive decisions, and keep faith in His promises, even when circumstances seem challenging. It also involves being mindful of how desperation can affect judgment and striving to maintain a perspective rooted in faith rather than fear.

8. What about this lesson has challenged you most? What is your biggest takeaway?