

DECEMBER 2012 FACILITATOR'S GUIDE



In His Hands

GOD'S RESPONSIVE CARE FOR STRANGERS AND SLAVES

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BEGINNING THOUGHTS...

Some relationships give more happiness than others. I enjoy spending time with my family, church family, and friends. We share a connection based on love, respect, kindness and honesty. However, I don't know of a family anywhere without some type of embarrassing situation, tragedy, sinful issue, or something not "normal" connected to it. Life is not predictable. If you think you don't have anything like that in your life, dig back a few generations or look at your relatives and just see what you find. Can we control anyone's actions except our own? And even then, we may lose control of our own fate. Our cultural norm is one husband at a time; other cultures allow multiple unions. No matter the culture, I would not give my husband to another woman for any reason. Our relationship means more to me than that.

Mrs. Abraham evidently did not share the same view. She rushed ahead of God's plan and will for her and Abraham's lives. In doing this, she caused a heap of trouble. The child born to her handmaid was wild and hard to manage. Father Abraham loved him but didn't show it too often because of his wife's jealousy and animosity. The plot thickened with the announcement of the long-awaited promise child to a couple "well stricken in age." I've visited quite a few nursing homes, but I've never seen a 90-year-old pregnant lady or a 100-year-old new dad. Can you even imagine? This would be quite a miraculous birth—such joy and excitement in the camp on the part of the parents to be. Meanwhile, another mother and child watched all of this unfold.

The story of Abraham and his two women is one of complexities and contrasts. It all comes down to trying to do God's job. This never works for good. God's ways and plans are not ours. Because of the shame, embarrassment, heartache, and feelings of utter helplessness we experience in our lives, we can relate. Life is hard. It's hard because of the sin nature that surrounds us. Yet, we can have the assurance God's power is stronger than any crisis or situation we might face. Know that *God's Mighty Hand* is available for you and me, just as it was for Hagar.
















IN HIS HANDS

Hagar the Slave

POINTER OF TRUTH: *"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?" (Isaiah 58:6).*

RULE OF THUMB: God cares and responds when we feel insignificant. Situations beyond our control remain within His.

-  Go over all the questions and answers in *Treasure*, p. 12, together.
 -  Have you ever had a situation you tried to resolve but couldn't control? How did it make you feel? Why do we tend to think, "It all depends on me"?
 -  What might have happened to Hagar if she had refused Sarai's request to sleep with Abram? Did she have a choice? (*Remember, she was a slave.*)
 -  On the other hand, did Sarai believe she had any other option? How old was she at this time? (*She was 10 years younger than Abraham. He was 86 when Ishmael was born so this makes Sarai 75 or 76.*)
 -  Unscramble the names of the slaves and servants on p. 38 of the 2012-2013 WNAC Program and Plan Book: *God's Mighty Hand*. (Make copies of this page for everyone. Read the Scriptures to find the names.)
 -  Sarai was barren, physically and spiritually. Have you ever felt "barren"?
 -  Is your Christian life producing fruit? Are you experiencing a season of love, joy, peace?
 -  Do you believe Sarai loved Abram? (*Yes, I do, because of the extreme measures she took in trying to provide him the child for which he longed.*)
 -  We know Sarai didn't go about things in the fruit of the Spirit but instead chose the spirit of the flesh. Do you think she regretted it the moment Abram and Hagar disappeared together?
 -  Have you ever had a problem in your life in which you played and re-played in your mind the methods of resolve? (*It will drive you nuts.*)
 -  When Sarai finally decided on an answer, what had she given up? (*1. Being the only wife—even in that culture, Abram had only one wife; 2. Abram's undivided affection; 3. Her best friend; 4. Her faith in God's promise.*)
 -  What was the result of her actions? (*Enmity—between herself and her husband, herself and her handmaid, herself and Ishmael; and yet today, enmity exists between Israel and neighboring Arab countries.*)
 -  Why did Abraham not remember or trust God's promise (Genesis 15:4)?
- GENTLE TOUCH:** Read Luke 16:13. Dismiss in prayer, and ask God to help you surrender your complete devotion and service to Him.

IN HIS HANDS


Hagar the Runaway





POINTER OF TRUTH: *"And the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur" (Genesis 16:7).*

RULE OF THUMB: God cares and responds when problems of life and even our own sinfulness tempt us to isolate ourselves or run away. He sees and He seeks His own.


 Go over the questions and answers on p.15 of *Treasure*, together.


 Does running away ever solve problems? (*Why or why not?*) What else might Hagar have done?


 Once Hagar found herself so alone in the wilderness, do you believe she began to trust the God of Abraham, the One she had seen him worshipping?


 Do you believe that God will care for your needs? (*Matthew 6:28-34 or Luke 12:27-31. Both passages show God provides divine care.*)

 Who appeared to Hagar giving her comfort and hope? (*The Angel of the Lord-Genesis 16:7-9).*


 What other birth announcements were made by the Angel of the Lord? (*to Manoah father of Samson—Judges 13:3; to Zacharias father of John the Baptist—Luke 1:11-13; to Joseph, husband of Mary—Matthew 1:20-21; and to Mary, mother of Jesus, Luke 1:28-31.*)

 If God took care of Hagar, do you not think He sees every detail of your life? (*Mary A. Kassian, in **Knowing God by Name**, says, "Hagar gave God the name "El Roi": the God who sees. This is the only time this name is applied to God, and it came from a runaway slave who found herself in the middle of a hopeless, tangled mess."*)

 What did God tell Hagar to do? (*Submit to her mistress—Genesis 16:9.*) Does this word instill a negative response in you? (*We tend to think of Ephesians 5:22 or Colossians 3:18.*)

 Read James 4:7. What does it tell you? (*To submit is to honor the Lord.*)

 Read Psalm 139:1-14. How do you feel knowing God sees all things about you?

 Write these verses in your journal to meditate on when you feel despondent or depressed. (*Psalm 56:11, 57:1; Luke 12:7; 1 Peter 3:12; Isaiah 41:10; Proverbs 22:6.*)

 Did you notice God's *Mighty Hand* of protection and provision in the verses you wrote down?

GENTLE TOUCH: Dismiss in a prayer of thankfulness and gratitude for a God who sees everything.




IN HIS HANDS


Hagar the Patriarch


POINTER OF TRUTH: *“And the angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude... And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?” (Genesis 16:10, 13).*


RULE OF THUMB: God cares and responds—even when we stray; He calls us to obedience and offers us promise of hope and a future.


 Go over the questions and answers on p. 17 of *Treasure* together.


 Do you wonder how Hagar felt when God told her that her offspring would be multiplied exceedingly? (*Genesis 16:10*)


 As if that wasn't surprise enough, how did she feel to find out her son would be a wild man? (*probably not every mother's dream—Genesis 16:12*).


 Do you find it comfortable to be around unruly children?

 Fast forward 14 years and we find Ishmael mocking Isaac. (*Proverbs 17:5*) How did that turn out? (*Genesis 21:10 finds Sarah giving Abraham an ultimatum.*)

 Was Abraham happy for Hagar and Ishmael to leave? (*No, he was very sad because Ishmael was the only son he had—Genesis 21:11.*)

 Would these two sons of Abraham ever have been able to get along in the same camp? (*Probably not. Galatians 4:28 is a picture of Isaac's life controlled by the Spirit and of Ishmael's life controlled by works of the flesh. Abraham had given in to the flesh in Genesis 16:3-4.*)

 Have you ever had anything that you found hurtful to give up? Giving up Ishmael was hurtful to Abraham, but God spoke and he obeyed. (*Genesis 21:12, 14*)

 When God speaks to you about giving up “things of the flesh”, do you listen? (*Matthew 5:29; 1John 2:16; Galatians 6:8 tells us that things of the flesh must be done away with.*)

GENTLE TOUCH: Dismiss by praying that God will reveal issues that are hurting you and give you the grace to get rid of them.



IN HIS HANDS


Hagar the Outcast

POINTER OF TRUTH: “And God heard the voice of the


lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is...And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink” (Genesis 21:17-19).

RULE OF THUMB: God cares and responds, providing needs and nourishment during wilderness times of our lives.


 Go over the questions and answers on p. 10 of *Treasure* together.

 Are you a single parent, know one or have one in your family?

 Do you realize the struggles involved in rearing children alone? Easy?


 How do you see the years (almost 14) between Ishmael's birth and Isaac's birth for the adults involved? (*Possibly filled with bitterness, strife, disagreements, jealousy, and heartache?*)


 Do you believe Hagar was accepted into a prominent place or that Sarah loved Ishmael?


 Did Abraham learn to totally depend on God during these years? (*He learned that God is the sufficient one—Genesis 17:1; John 15:5; 2 Corinthians 3:5.*)

 Is God able to work through us to accomplish what He desires?


 Do you ever wonder why God allowed these circumstances to happen? Or those in your life that you don't understand?

 Did Abraham love Hagar or feel anything for her? (*We're not told except that he gave her some bread and a bottle of water and sent her away. Doesn't sound much like love, does it? But he did show some compassion.*)

 Why did Abram cast her away this time, when before, he left it up to Sarah? (*God told him to. This time Abram listened and obeyed the voice of God—Genesis 21:12.*)

 Why did Hagar and Ishmael have to go? (*God had not chosen Ishmael; but He let him stay in the camp until Isaac, the heir, came along.*)

 Was God cruel to Hagar and Ishmael? (*No, He had been patient, caring, and tender by providing for them.*)

 Did God care any less for Hagar? (*No, He made sure that she and her son were all right—Genesis 21:19-21.*)

GENTLE TOUCH: Read Joshua 1:9 or say it together. Dismiss in prayer and claim this promise.

WRAPPING UP...

We all experience excitement, fear, heartache and joy at some point or another throughout our lifetime. The fact is that God sees each event, each emotion. He knows everything about us and our feelings. The beauty of that is the fact that His Mighty Hand is over us protecting, guiding, sustaining and blessing. Oh, what a loving Savior we have. Oh, what a merciful God we serve. Oh, how comforting to know the Holy Spirit. Say with me the words of the prophet Isaiah, *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”* Rejoice in the Lord. Praise Him for being so compassionate and loving to us. As we approach the Christmas season, be thankful for your family, and truly mean it.