

## Week Two \* Day One

# The God Who Sees Me

I have known God since childhood, yet I still have moments of utter astonishment over His revealed activity when all that will come to my lips is Psalm 8:4, “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” Though the thought of our invitation to approach God amazes me, I am at times almost stricken face to the ground when I realize afresh how readily, how willingly, God approaches us. In the manifold operations of running the universe, not only is He ever with us but also He interrupts us at times with an unexpected revelation of His pure pursuit of us. Indeed, what is man that He is mindful of us? I shake my head with wonder. We are not an afterthought to God. We are the point of His involvement with this planet. He does not just tolerate us, He pursues us. Indeed, He *seeks us* though we are never out of sight. “Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom. 11:33)!

**Please read all of Genesis 16 to retain the context, then we’ll discuss the text in two parts. After reading, concentrate on Genesis 16:1-6.**

We might entitle this portion of Scripture “The Trouble With Helping God.” And believe me, it always leads to trouble. Satan capitalizes on this portion of our femininity. God has wired us in wonderful ways. By nature we tend to be nurturers, straighteners, fixers. To want to help is part of our original wiring. Remember this portion of Genesis 2? “But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God ... made a woman ... and he brought her to the man.”

Where do we think our drive to advise originates? Most men don’t have an affinity for hearing other people’s problems, but women often thrive on it. Why? Partly because we enjoy telling people what to do with their lives. It’s in our wiring. Clearly Sarai got her wires crossed.

Satan prides himself on tangling our wiring until the outcome is a knotted counterfeit of God’s wiring. Help tangles into manipulation with the slightest rerouting. Recently I was preparing for a Sunday school lesson when a related sentence came into my mind that seemed to come from the Holy Spirit: “Anything you have to manipulate to get is rarely yours to keep.” I sat before God recalling instances in my life which support such a statement. Sometimes I knew I was being manipulative. Other times I sincerely convinced myself that I was just trying to help and wanted what was best for everybody. (I know this is shocking to all of you who are like me, but wanting what is best is not always synonymous with knowing what is best.)

I can remember trying to manipulate certain relationships and interests for my husband, my children, or myself. Although such manipulations sometimes got off to a promising start, they never “kept.” With enough thought, other examples came to mind about positions or opportunities I tried to “help” bring about that never lasted.

### Today’s Treasure

She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.”

**Genesis 16:13**



How about you? Have you ever manipulated something that you didn't get to keep? If you're comfortable sharing it, do so briefly.

---

---



Anything you have  
to manipulate  
to get is rarely  
yours to keep.

I don't doubt for a minute that my womanly wires would have gotten crossed in a dilemma like Sarai's. Then again, who can imagine coming up with Sarai's method of childbearing? What wife in her right mind would hand her husband over to another woman? A younger woman? Let's make two quick observations. First of all, desperation can make an otherwise lucid person do outrageous things. Wouldn't you agree? Secondly, the custom of acquiring an heir through a maidservant was practiced in parts of the ancient world.

*The New International Commentary* quotes four ancient texts that suggest practices similar to the one Sarai offered to Abram. "An Old Assyrian marriage contract" included this instruction: "If within two years she has not procured offspring for him, only she may buy a maid-servant and even later on, after she procures somehow an infant for him, she may sell her wherever she pleases"<sup>1</sup>

God never adjusts His commands to fit the customs of nations, no matter how deeply ingrained they are. Furthermore, His immutable standards prove right every time—and for each party involved. History has yet to record a single nation completely free of oppressive or unjust customs. God never oppresses people. People oppress people.

Take another look at our text. Study the dialogue between Sarai and Abram very carefully.

Does either one of them ever call Hagar by name?  yes  no

How do they refer to her? \_\_\_\_\_

Any time we seek to use, oppress, abuse, or remove others, we first invariably disconnect from their individuality (name, personal rights). For instance, Hitler systematically brainwashed his governmental leaders to view the Jews as animals and to assign them numbers instead of names. On a much smaller scale, any of us are far more successful in nursing our prejudices if we can avoid knowing our target group personally and seeing them as individuals with value. Hagar's personal rights and choices were never figured into Sarai and Abram's alternative plan. Hagar was just a "servant," a "her," a "she."

No wonder Hagar "began to despise her mistress" after she realized she was pregnant (Gen. 16:4). Such a change in attitude invariably happens in relationships God doesn't ordain. God's instructions regarding how we engage in relationships and how we treat one another are meant to simplify and bless our lives. Every time I've departed from God's will for my relationships (meanwhile trying to rationalize or spiritualize), they ended up souring. Have you noticed the same thing in your own relationships? Hagar's reasons for despising Sarai were probably as complex and tangled as the feminine wires that had gotten crossed.

Let's admit it. Pregnancy is physically and emotionally challenging under the best of circumstances; so factor in the resentment aggravated by hormones and discomfort. Women

seldom have one feeling at a time, so complicate the matter even further with Hagar's feelings of superiority over Sarai. Hagar the maidservant completed what Sarai the respected wife started, concocting a perfect formula for disaster.

**What part of Proverbs 30:21-23 speaks to Sarai and Hagar's strange arrangement?**

---

No doubt the earth under Abram's feet trembled as Sarai announced, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering" (Gen. 16:5). Instead of falling to his knees, Abram responded passively, "Do with her whatever you think best" (16:6). For crying out loud, no one was thinking well, let alone *best!*

**Glance once again at verses 7-15. By the time we catch up with Hagar, she has traveled quite a distance and is obviously on her way back to Egypt. Try to crawl into Hagar's character for a moment. If you were she, what would you have planned to do once you arrived, and what would you have told your relatives?**

---

Of all the things we might imagine Hagar felt, surely the intensity of aloneness was almost unbearable. The last thing she expected was to encounter God. Don't you suppose she assumed Yahweh was Abram and Sarai's God? Not an Egyptian maidservant's. No, Hagar wasn't looking for God. God was looking for Hagar.

God's sudden revelation through the angel of the LORD is stunning. "The phrase 'angel of Yahweh' appears 58 times in the OT and 'angel of God' 11 times."<sup>2</sup> Scripture doesn't allow us to categorically assume every occurrence of these phrases depicts God Himself or a preincarnate revelation of His Son. Many of the instances equate the angel with deity, but others separate the two. When the angel of the LORD or the angel of God proves himself distinct from deity, we can still assume the utterly miraculous and profound. Check the context in Hagar's encounter.

**Do you think the angel of the LORD in this context was deity or a powerful messenger sent by God? Support your answer with Scripture.**

---

The only evidence raising any argument against Hagar's encounter with God Himself is the terminology in verse 11 "the LORD has heard of your misery." However, this evidence doesn't tip the scale against the evidence in favor of her having encountered God Himself. Very likely God referred to Himself in third person to make sure she knew His identity. I am convinced this glorious intruder in Hagar's plan was God Himself. Verse 7 stirs my heart deeply. God *found* Hagar. And yet, God the Omniscient—infinately aware—knew



where she was all along. The intention of the wording is to make sure the reader knows God sought Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant. Do you think she glanced over her shoulder to find someone else He was surely seeking? Aren't we like that sometimes? We have difficulty imagining God would bother with such a grand revelation for us alone. Are you far more likely to associate God's presence with a corporate gathering of believers or with your pastor or Bible study leader? Do you think He would bother for you alone?

Through what questions did God dialouge with Hagar (vv. 8-14)?

---

Do you think He knew the answers?  yes  no

If so, why do you think He asked them?

---

Dear One, very often God initiates intimacy with us by raising fresh questions. Hard questions. Even questions that have no earthly answers. But the search leads us to heaven's door. God often causes us to search ourselves, asking us to articulate what we're feeling and why we're making some of our present choices. In I Kings 19:9 God asked, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" In John 20:15, Christ asked Mary Magdalene, "Woman, why are you crying?" Countless times in various circumstances I've felt the Holy Spirit say to me, "Beth, why are you doing this?" or "Why are you sad?"

Beloved, would you be bold and risk intimacy with God as you answer the questions He whispers to your heart?

From where have you come?

---

Where are you going?

---

*Can you identify  
your path —  
both behind you  
and immediately  
in front of you?*

You may not be in a negative place, but can you identify your path—both behind you and immediately in front of you? A lump wells in my throat as I consider that by God's grace He has a plan even when we leave it. God didn't call the baby "that maidservant's child." He called him by name: *Ishmael* meaning "Yahweh has been attentive to your humiliation."<sup>3</sup> Read these words as often as you must to absorb them into your own belief system: "Yahweh has been attentive." To you, Dear One, to you!

To me, even in the humiliation I brought on myself.

God knew the Ishmaelites would exist as surely as the Israelites. Their existence was their manifest destiny. You no doubt noticed that the news concerning Hagar's son was not altogether lovely. God stated the prophetic description of Ishmael as a matter of fact, not as a curse or a compulsion. Then something happened in Genesis 16:13 that is unparalleled in Scripture. Hagar gave God a name. No other character in the Old Testament, male or female, ever does such a thing. Only Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant.

What name did she give Him? (16:13) \_\_\_\_\_

In Hebrew, *El Roi*. Ours, Dear One, is the God who sees. Is there any particular reason why that name means something special to you right now?

---

Hagar's next statement is equally moving. "I have now seen the One who sees me." The sentence could more literally be translated from the Hebrew as a question: "Have I really seen the back of Him who sees me?"<sup>4</sup> A Hebrew word for "back" is articulated in the original language.

Why might Hagar seeing God's back make sense in reference to Exodus 33:20-23?

---

The divinely initiated encounter between God and Hagar began with these words: "The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert." How like God to become her Spring in the desert. *El Roi*. He sees when no one else cares to look. He sees through the smile we wear when we're dying inside. He sees our hurt when we're mistreated. He sees us when we cry into our pillow because we feel unloved. He sees beyond our sin into the depth of our need. He sees when we're hiding. Running. He sees when we continue to sow the seed of His Word even in the floodplain of our grief. Sometimes we don't realize we've encountered God until our vision clears. Maybe that's what seeing His back means. He is the God who sees *you*.

## Week Three \* Day Two

# Laughing Out Loud

Nothing on earth rivals the ecstasy of experiencing a heavenly promise fulfilled. God's appointment of time in between the word of promise and its fulfillment can tempt us to ridiculous thoughts like, "I'm going to fool around and die before God remembers to bring this to pass." And as if waiting for God's time isn't hard enough, God fills the waiting with tests like a clerk who shoves grapefruits into a bulging grocery bag. Room for one more . . . and maybe another . . . and, look, there's a little space for another small one. When the bag grows heavy like "time . . . fully come" (Gal. 4:4), the breakthrough erupts and fruit rolls.

Sarah knew the feeling. Her wait, like ours, was about what God wanted to birth and maybe even what God wanted to kill (all other options).

Before I get too excited and teach the whole lesson in advance, hasten to Genesis 21:1-7 and record the promise God fulfilled:

---



### Today's Treasure

Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me."

**Genesis 21:6**