

## Reading Scripture through our Privileged Lens

*Rise & Shine, June 28, 2020*

### **Genesis 21:8-21**

*The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.*

*When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.*

*God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.*

### **Questions:**

1. In what ways have you struggled with Scripture as it relates to context of systemic oppression (think of stories like Ruth)?
2. In what ways do Christians currently use the Bible to relinquish responsibility to reconciling change in the world?
3. If you could re-write the story of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar, how would you hope they would have behaved and how does that inform you of the kind of leadership you would like to offer to the world?

*The following is a personal reflection on privilege and a wrestle with scripture from Maggie Gough.*

When I read about how Sarah told Abraham to cast out Hagar, in our current climate of racial discourse, I cringed. It was like God was saying it was okay to cast out another human being. I wondered how many Christians had read this text over centuries and seeing themselves like Abraham, chose to relinquish their responsibility to slaves because God would take good care of the slaves in the wilderness. I wonder how many Christians saw themselves as powerless, like Abraham, in commonly accepted systems of oppression where the slave was the slave and that's just how it was. I wondered

how many women saw themselves like Sarah, stuck in a society with laws that left her feeling like there was nothing she could do, but cast out the slave and her boy in order to protect her own.

I was frustrated when I read that God told Abraham to do what he needed to do. None of it made sense. How could we have a God that so loved Hagar but didn't demand that Abraham do better for her.

I wanted to read a story about how Abraham, in his faith in God, and being the most privileged person in the story went to Sarah and apologized for the time he left her to the Egyptian Prince, reminding her that he would protect everyone. I wanted to read a story about how Abraham refused to cast out Hagar and protected her from Sarah's beatings. I wanted to read a story about how in the newly found safety, kindness and protection from Abraham, Sarah was able to apologize to Hagar for her cruelty.

Instead, I had a story about people in a system of oppression who did nothing to change it and a God who said, "I will take care of this."

I didn't like it. So, I sat with it. I remembered that I read somewhere that Hagar was only one of two people in the whole Bible who dared to name God. She is brave. I went back and re-read the whole story of Abraham and Sarah and Hagar.

Then I realized something key...I was reading this from a place of privilege so I read it like I am Sarah or Abraham, not Hagar. Then I remembered that Rachel Held Evans had a special chapter on Hagar in the last book she had written. So, I read that. I will read this at the opening of the discussion on Sunday.

Then I remembered that God was in relationship with people God already knew were messy and flawed. I also realized that in my privilege I assumed God condoned Abraham and Sarah, but God did not. God simply assured everyone's safety.

God doesn't condone or condemn or encourage their actions.

God simply shows up in their flawed choices.

That means that Abraham did have a choice, as did Sarah. They held the power. They could have done differently. We too can do differently. God will love us when we fail, but we are still responsible to try.