

KNOWN IN LOVE

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 God who sees me." (Genesis 16:13, NIV)

IT ONLY TAKES A MOMENT TO MAKE YOURSELF A GOLF OUTSIDER. A big OB ball or an ill-timed four-putt, and the air is sucked right out of your proverbial balloon. But the experience—and anyone who has ever competed has faced this—is anything but proverbial. It leaves you humbly looking up at the “good players.”

Today’s lesson is about outsiders, people who have no comfortable place among the beautiful, among the winners.

We’ll take as our example Hagar, the handmaid of Sarai, wife of Abram, the one who would become Abraham. Yes, that Abraham, of “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” The Abraham, we should say here, who was head of the household where Hagar lived.

Now, culture comes into significant play here, but the first outsider was Sarai. Unable to bear children, she felt the shame of all barren women of her time. Never mind that our present biological knowledge tells us that this is as commonly the male’s “fault.” The woman bore the brunt. And here was Sarai, too late in life, giving her personal servant to her husband for one stark purpose: to sleep with Abraham and provide the child she could not give him.

But when Hagar became pregnant, the servant despised the mistress and the mistress mistreated her in spite. Hagar fled into the wilderness, to what she presumed would be her death.

Instead, when she sat down by a spring, God found her there. Presenting himself as the angel of the Lord, he spoke gently to the woman, asking her where she was going. Hagar explained. Then God did two things. He charged Hagar to return to her home and to honor her mistress. Then he promised that Hagar’s child would produce many descendants, in the same way that he would later promise the same for Sarai’s baby, Isaac.

Here Hagar found a blessing she had never anticipated, one she read this way: the favor of the Lord. She knew she had been seen in her deep troubles by the one great Comforter. And she was awed that she too had seen him in this angel who had spoken to her of his care and of her purpose. What a personal God she now knew, one “abounding in love.”

Opening questions Describe a time when a friendship really took hold in your life. What understanding or episode brought you and this friend together for good, in respect and support for one another?

READING Genesis 21:8-21, John 4:1-30 & 39-42, Ephesians 3:14-19

God keeps his promise

In Genesis 21, Hagar experienced further fear of demise, both for her and her son. How did God intervene to preserve his promise to her?

The woman at the well

John 4 leads us to another woman who encounters God at a well. What highlights of this exchange between her and Jesus demonstrate God’s concern for those who need him desperately? How does she testify about the way God has loved her and what does this testimony produce?

The fullness of God’s love

Consider yourself the recipient of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. How do the verses in chapter 3 speak to you? What causes you to desire to know more of God’s love for you?

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