



Sermon Discussion Guide
Even If: I Am Loved
Sunday, February 14, 2021
Based on Pastor Jason's Message

Introduction

We're in week two of a four week series where we're looking at stories from the Old Testament about people who faced unexpected problems, and chose to trust in God and follow Him through those challenges. The question we're asking ourselves is, "Will I follow God, *even if* things don't go the way I planned?" In this second lesson we learn that even if we don't feel loved, we can know that God loves us.

To watch this week's sermon before your group discussion, go to www.journeyoffaith.com/messages

Share Your Story

1. What is "love" to you? How would you define it *briefly* and at its most foundational level?

Hear God's Story

2. Read Genesis 16 straight through. How would you summarize what's going on here?
3. What can we learn about God in this story, and what challenges you the most?
4. In the second part of this story we see that God was there for Hagar when others weren't. Just like back then with her, God still tells us today, "I see you, I know you, I love you, and I have a future for you." What stops you from truly internalizing God's love for you so you can take your spiritual life to a whole other level? Pause for a few moments to prayerfully contemplate that, then share with your group.
5. In this story we can learn that God's love is bigger than romantic relationships. This was a messed up and complex situation with no white picket fence around it, yet we see God's love having the last say still. What's one practical action step you can take this next week to remind someone of God's love for them, as you look beyond the complexities and focus on God's larger picture?

Create a New Story

6. How does what we talked about in this story help draw you closer to God?
7. What areas in your life do you need to surrender over to God so you can better represent His heart to others?

Further Studies: Joining God in Loving the Hagers and Ishmaels Among Us

GOD'S MESSAGE: PROS & QUESTIONS

God had multiple messages for Hagar in Genesis 16. This includes a positive message, both in showing compassion for Hagar's "affliction" from Sarah's harsh treatment and in promising the blessing of numerous generations, which will be repeated in 17:20 and elaborated in 25:12ff. In 25:12-18 we learn that God blessed Ishmael with 12 sons who ended up all being valued leaders in their community. We see that God told Hagar He'd bless Ishmael, and He followed through with His promise.

However, on the negative side, though God said He'd bless Ishmael, He stated that it was His desire for His covenant to only go through Isaac at that time (17:21). This brings us to confronting the tension we get when we question why God chooses to govern as He wishes above how we think He should. In either case, Isaac or Ishmael, we see God taking note of those in His plan and those outside of it; and, desiring to care for them. But, because God focused on the "main thing" of His mission in the world, He stuck to it and used Isaac's line to accomplish it, even though that meant that Ishmael would live on the outskirts of common civilization (hence, like a wild donkey). Panning out, we see God's heart broke for Hagar, and He took note of her and her child until their deaths.

A CALL TO THE OTHERS-FOCUS

Historically, the people of ancient Israel often used this story to develop a negative perception of Arabian tribes as marauding groups, and it helped to build their negative views of the outsider, immigrant, uncircumcised, and non-Semitic Philistines. But, we don't read in Scripture that God wants us to hatefully shun the outsider as has been customary to interpret especially when looking at 16 in isolation. We can sometimes as Christians ask, "Am I to love even non-believers?" Well, God did in this story and so many other stories throughout the Bible, and still does today. But too often we don't, do we?

This others-focus was elaborated in Jesus' teachings all over the place. It wasn't a new teaching of Jesus. Rather, it was a common message that shows God's heart even back in Genesis when He chose to care for Hagar and Ishmael. God still chose to bless the "outsider," so we are too with our unchurched neighbors, friends, family members, or coworkers, with the hopes that they'll become part of God's covenant today. The floodgates are now open for all to come to God and become adopted into His family. But this can't be done if we're worshipping an "us vs. them" mentality, rather than having a heart that breaks for all people as God's did in Genesis 16. When we justify holding a spirit of divisiveness, the heart of God we model becomes marred and lacks Christ-centered impact. But, when we model God's heart in caring for even the lost and hurting among us, even if they don't go to our church or vote differently than us, we're able to better join God in His mission that's bigger than us. Love takes root, transformation happens, and lives become saved; and, we'll find our own relationship with Him will deepen along the way as we choose to love the Hagers and Ishmaels in our own lives.

DISCUSS

1. It's challenging to see how God's care even went beyond His covenant people in Genesis 16. What biases or justifications do you use sometimes to only show care toward those you've deemed "my people"?
2. Think of the "Hagar" or "Ishmael" in your life you've been avoiding showing God's love to, or not showing it as well as you know you should. What's one practical step you can take this week to model God's heart better in that relationship?
3. What has come to your mind that you need to change or strengthen within yourself to help you join God in modeling His limitless love in community?
4. Action: Spend a few moments in silence as a group praying for those things God's brought to light within you. Then, ask Him to help you increase your surrender so your walk becomes less about you and more about His greater mission in the world.)
5. Action: Think of how far you've come in your life and how God was there through it all. Now, close this time by sharing what you're most thankful for when you think of how much God loves you.

For Parents: Repackaging for Youth

1. For those who have young children in the home, what are some ways you could teach this lesson to them that takes into account their age and learning level?

For questions about this curriculum, contact Pastor Matthew Jensen at matthew.jensen@journeyoffaith.com