

# Nurturing Trust

Sarah and Hagar

**Central Idea:** Moms nurture and engender trust in the Lord, teaching their children by example how to build faith in God.

## Introduction

Each of us has someone in our family that is crazy. In fact, some people believe that their whole family is nuts! Families are interesting and messy and difficult from time to time, but if your family is anything like mine, we are always there for one another when there is an emergency.

On top of the strange things in our families, we have these wonderful people called moms who take care of everything, whether they want to or not. They work hard, clean up messes, listen to complaints, and are our foundation as we grow up. They do all this without seeking fame or demanding compensation! We are so focused on our own problems when we come to mom that we don't think about her and her own issues, the things she's got going on in her life as she helps us. We don't give moms enough credit for keeping themselves together enough to be our foundations.

Of course, some moms are judged to be better than others by us and others and the world. Today, I want to talk about two mothers who were so judged differently, and yet they both were on a journey of faith as they raised two very different but important boys. As we hear their stories, we will see principles for our own lives this morning. But let's start with a scene in which we see the ups and downs of life for both of them!

## Text – Genesis 16:7-16

<sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. <sup>8</sup> And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai." <sup>9</sup> The angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress and submit to her." <sup>10</sup> The angel of the LORD also said to her, "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude." <sup>11</sup> And the angel of the LORD said to her, "Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction. <sup>12</sup> He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen." <sup>13</sup> So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." <sup>14</sup> Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered. <sup>15</sup> And Hagar bore Abram a son, and

Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. <sup>16</sup> Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

### Moment of Loss

We start in the middle, where the lowest point of faith is happening for both Sarah and Hagar. Hagar has headed out into the wilderness, fleeing from an abusive and angry Sarah. While she ran away, no one came looking for her. No search party was to be found, but she met God in that place and He was there for her when no one else was. But we're getting ahead of ourselves! How did Hagar end up estranged from the family she served? Boy have I got a story for you! It's full of intrigue, infighting and some pretty risqué ideas! Let's start at the beginning so we understand the full brunt of this low point of faith.

### Leaving Home

There was a woman named Sarah married to a man named Abraham. Abraham was not like all the other guys she knew. But one day, Abraham told her that he heard the Living God, and God told him a couple of wacky things! God said that He wanted Abraham and Sarah to go into the wilderness and find a new home. He said that Sarah, who could not have children, would be the mother of a great nation!

Sarah must have looked at Abraham like he was the class clown. Really?! They have to leave everything they know and their family and everyone they love, go out into the middle of nowhere and start over? What wife wants that? It was comfortable in Ur. There were people and there was culture. They had connections and were doing well. Why leave? And that's not all! The kicker? ...Abraham was not told exactly where to go! Yeah, they were just gonna start walking until God told them where to settle! If I were Sarah, I'd be contacting the insane asylum, or at least the county courthouse to consider divorce options.

But Sarah went with Abraham. We spend a lot of time talking about this man of faith and his growing in faith in the Lord, but Sarah had to grow and develop her faith in God as well. She had to choose to say yes and to go with him on this wild journey. And she did. Just as much as Abraham is a man of faith, so also is Sarah the "mother of faith," if you will.

And that's not all. She was barren. She could not have children. That, of course, was the worst thing that could happen in her time, to not be able to bear a son for her husband to have an heir. I'm sure Sarah liked the idea of the second part of this Lord's plan. That would make her blessed to bear an heir! So Sarah agreed and stepped out in faith with her husband. This is actually the high point of our story as we start, because things are about to get hairy!

Application: We have high points in faith and low points. There are times where our faith can move mountains and we never say no to God. But there are other times when patience in His

plans and promises is much harder, in the midst of our waiting and seeking, and we are weaker then and able to make compromises. But compromises in our faith can lead to even more trials!

#### Sister or Wife?

One of the ways that Sarah was supportive of Abraham in this endeavor was to agree to say she was his sister instead of wife when Abraham felt they would be in danger. After all, they don't know anyone in these parts. Besides that, what's to stop a king or ruler with authority and power from taking Sarah and killing Abraham? In that culture, a ruler would deal with a brother in seeking a wife, but it was most likely that a ruler would rather kill a husband and take what he wanted in his wife.

So Abraham lays out this plan, that is not completely false, to protect himself and Sarah. When they go into a dangerous place, Sarah agreed to say she was his sister instead of his wife so that they would be safe. That's pretty weird for us to understand today, but this was a common custom in their day. However, it was also a way for Abraham to not demonstrate his faith. You see, God wanted Abraham and Sarah to trust in Him for their safety, not in their own cunning and ways. But they did not do that.

Just as much as Abraham is getting some things right in his journey toward total faith in the Lord, so also is Sarah. But this time, in Egypt during a famine, she is in grave danger! God rescues her from the hand of Pharaoh and saves both of them. If only they had trusted the Lord for their safety, they would have been almost inhuman in their faith. But that is not how things went down.

The incredible thing about this story is that they use this ploy again in another part of the country with Abimelek (Gen 20). What I love about this is that Abraham and Sarah show us that we can fail more than once, even in the same area of trusting, when we are trying to grow in our faith. Application: There might be multiple times when we fail God, even in the same way of thinking or misunderstanding His promises. But God still rescues us and guides us and He is so patient with us. Eventually, like Abraham and Sarah, we will learn to trust in Him rather than our own abilities.

#### Chick Fight!

Sarah has a servant that works for her named Hagar. We met Hagar in the beginning of our story and she was in the wilderness about to die when God rescued her. Notice that God keeps rescuing these people who have a bit of faith, but not a ton? He is always the hero of our faith story!

Sarah's like any of us. She has certain hang-ups, certain things in which she is not confident. One of them is the fact that she can't bear any children. Like most women in that time and culture,

and in some cultures today, she put all her worth in her ability to have children for her husband. But she could not do that, and in her own eyes first, and then in the eyes of others, like Hagar, she is seen as a failure and made fun of.

Sarah devises a plan to make the promise given to Abraham happen, because she wants to be a mom and have an heir for him. She tells Abraham to try out plan B and take her maidservant Hagar and have a child with her! Now in their culture, this child would legally belong to Sarah, and could be made the heir. But then there's backlash from this plan. Sarah becomes jealous of Hagar because she conceives a son.

To make matters worse, Hagar begins to taunt her and make her feel even worse because Hagar can conceive, but Sarah cannot. She can't take this kind of pressure anymore! So she does what any of us would do. She tattle-tales on Hagar to Abraham. Abraham tells her that Hagar is her problem. You see, sometimes moms have to deal with husbands who don't lead that well yet. Aside from that, what man wants to deal with his angry wife and gloating mistress? Without realizing it, Abraham put Hagar in danger because Sarah was mad, and he put Sarah in a dangerous place because he gave her full reign to enforce her anger. And that's exactly what happened!

Application: When we follow our own plans instead of God's they are bound to create way more problems than we need! When we think we are being cunning or helpful, it may turn into the opposite. It is better to trust and wait patiently for the Lord's plans in our lives. That patience is a very hard concept for us to keep in our lives, but it makes all the difference and keeps us from a world of hurt.

So Sarah gets abusive. She takes advantage of Hagar and in her hate creates an environment of fear from her maidservant and the newborn. Hagar does what any good mom would do. She escapes from the danger. She runs away. Here's the worst part. No one comes after her. No one gets a search party together. If Abraham did this, Sarah would surely have murdered him in anger because it would look like he chose Hagar (who can bear children) over Sarah. Sarah was mad at her, and would not have cared if she lived or died.

And in the midst of that moment, when her and Ishmael are about to die, God steps in and becomes "The God who sees me." Hagar knew nobody cared about her. None of this, well except for the nagging of Sarah, was her fault. She was a slave. If Sarah wanted her to be with Abraham, it wasn't her fault. She was obeying her master. It's not her fault she's fertile either! She dealt with it by running away, but now that has only put her and her son in jeopardy.

Application: Moms make mistakes. They're not perfect and they don't always get it right. But their love for their kids makes them very creative and they long for their children to do well in

life. So sometimes, it requires God's special hand for them to know how to handle a special situation. God is always there for each of us. He is the God who sees us when no one is even looking our way. He knows our pains, our struggles, and our personalities. He knows our situation, and He's working in our favor! God saved Hagar and Ishmael. Even those that are seen as the rebels of the story, both now and later in the wilderness when they get kicked out of Dodge by Sarah and Abraham, they are taken care of God, and He is big enough to be the God of their story as much as the God of Sarah's story!

#### Laughter in Faith

There is a play on the idea of laughter in the lives of Abraham and Sarah. You see, God told Abraham in Genesis 17 that he would have a son through Sarah. And you know what Abraham did? He laughed (Gen 17:17). He actually tried to get God to agree with the idea of having Ishmael as an heir. But God would have none of that. This man who had believed enough in His plan to leave his home could not conceive of a God who had all the power in the universe.

God set Abraham straight, but then He came to Abraham and Sarah a while later. This promise had been at least 10 years in the making, and God came to finalize His plan through three representatives, which many believe to be the three members of the Trinity. God came and reiterated the promise, and gave special attention to Sarah, asking about her. Of course, she was nearby and listening with great interest.

Can you imagine the amount of stress Sarah went through? God promises this heir, implicates it must be through her, and she's pushing 90 years old! How in the world could this come to pass? Well, it would take a miracle of God to open her womb. Sarah listens intently to the conversation. Then she hears her name, and then the promise of a son through her. And she responds the same way that Abraham does. She laughs in herself, a sort of chuckle. Could God do that? Could He do the impossible?

Sarah's laugh is out of disbelief, and she is brought into the light for it. The Lord deals with her and she gets scared. What will happen if she admits she laughed? So she tried to deny it, but the Lord would not allow it. I believe there's a reason for that. God wants us to remember our moments of unbelief, of thinking that God couldn't do that impossible thing in our lives. Sure, he can do it for others, but for us? God makes her remember the laugh, and also Abraham's laugh. And he does it in a very unique way.

The ironic thing is that God is as surprised by their laughing in disbelief as they are surprised that God keeps promising the impossible. The Lord is shocked because the one promising this impossible thing does the impossible! Why would they laugh? Why would they disbelieve? Consider the source. This is God Almighty, the Creator of all things. Surely He can open a womb!

Well, the Lord gives even further evidence. He says it will happen within the year! God assigns a time finally to the promise that has been around for quite a while. Sure enough, within the year, Sarah finds herself not only pregnant, but holding her newborn miracle child! And you know what she does? She calls him, "Laughter." That's right, the name Isaac means *laughter*. I think there's a certain serendipity in God's plans. That same laughter that she had in disbelief, she now has that laughter bubbling up in the joy that the promise brings when it becomes reality.

Application: It's the same way with faith. God can use those moments of disbelief and remind us of how we didn't believe, but He did it anyway. We weren't faithful to honor His promise for us, but He was faithful to bring it to fruition. He connects the new situation of a promise made real to the time before that promise was real. Our faith is strengthened when He promises something greater, because we saw Him do the impossible before. Remembering those moments of disbelief shows us that we were wrong and that God did what He said He would do.

## **Conclusion**

On Mother's Day, we honor those special women in our lives who are themselves dealing with their own struggles and issues and growing in their own faith, and yet they teach us how to trust in God for great and impossible things. They show us God through their nurture and love and being on our side, showing us that we're never alone, and that even when we feel like no one cares or is watching out for us, like God in Heaven, they are here on earth for us! Moms make us better through their constant and unfailing faithfulness to their children! Through thick and thin, moms are always there. And they show us God as our foundation, a concrete image of His constant hand in our lives.