

hagar

Target of a Jealous Beauty Queen

SHANNON PRIMICERIO

TRUELIFE BIBLE STUDIES



Sample from *Hagar* / ISBN 1-60006-113-3

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THINK
P.O. Box 35001
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80935

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www.navpress.com

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ISBN-13: 978-1-60006-113-4

ISBN-10: 1-60006-113-3

Cover design by Charles Brock, The DesignWorks Group, Inc, www.thedesignworksgroup.com
Creative Team: Nicci Hubert, Karen Lee-Thorp, Cara Iverson, Darla Hightower, Arvid Wallen, Kathy Guist

Published in association with the Books & Such Literary Agency, Janet Kobobel Grant, 52 Mission Circle, Suite 122, PMB 170, Santa Rosa, CA, 95409-5370, www.booksandsuch.biz.

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Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 / 11 10 09 08 07

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To Krystal Perrin:

*Thanks for the past twenty years of friendship!
I'm looking forward to many more. . .*

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THE SUPPORTING ROLE

IF HAGAR'S STORY WERE A movie, she wouldn't be the star. Instead she would play a supporting role to Sarah, Abraham's wife. Hagar's story has always intrigued me because it embodies so many things that I have felt at one time or another: used by others, jealous, insecure, fearful, defiant, and even far from God. Generations and cultural barriers may distance us from Hagar, but the more I read her story, the more certain I am that there are glimpses of Hagar everywhere around us—from the girl next door to the girl in the mirror. I knew a few Hagar's in high school, and I have played Hagar in my own life more than once. Of course, her name was never used. But her tendencies came through loud and clear.

I often wish God had told us more about this slave girl who was the victim of manipulation, abuse, and rejection. But her tragedies aren't what I wish I knew more of. No. I wish we were told more about Hagar's strengths. How did she endure time alone with Abraham in

his tent when she knew he was just looking for an heir? When she was sent back to face Sarah after enduring a cruel tongue-lashing and who knows what else, how did she muster the grace to let that woman mother the child Hagar herself bore until Sarah had her own son fourteen years later?

Sarah has always been painted as the beautiful matriarch of the children of Israel. She is commended for her faith in regard to the birth of her son Isaac. But to tell you the truth, I'm not all that impressed with her. When you look at her through the lenses of Hagar's story, you see a different picture, and it's not a very flattering one. But Hagar wasn't innocent either. Her relationship with Sarah was a tumultuous wrestling match for power. Theirs is a story of jealousy and betrayal that makes most mean girls look nice.

We are going to spend the bulk of our time together focusing on Hagar's life, but it would be impossible to do so without casting Sarah in a supporting role. I'm sure that in real life it was almost always the other way around.

Perhaps you feel like a supporting character in someone else's story. Maybe you are tired of playing backup to a superstar and you have felt cheated, used, or rejected. Or, in a more honest evaluation, perhaps you have felt downright jealous of the girl who is hogging your spotlight. I've been there before, and so has Hagar. That's what makes her story relevant. It's what makes it worth reading. Let's see what the girl in the supporting role can teach us when she is finally given the spotlight. Hopefully learning from her mistakes will make us more prepared for our spotlights when they come.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BIBLE STUDY

YOU HAVE A BUSY LIFE. Homework, sports, and other extracurricular activities demand a lot of your time. I know that. To make this study easy to fit into your schedule, I have divided Hagar's story into six weeklong segments. But I have not broken each week into daily assignments. It's up to you to find the easiest way for you to get through the material allotted for each week.

In order for you to get the most out of this study, it is vital that you take time to read the assigned passages. The main text for each week is provided for you, but you will be responsible for looking up additional passages on your own. It is also essential that you answer each question thoughtfully and thoroughly. The quizzes and various activities are fun, but they are also important. So don't skip over these portions, thinking you won't get anything out of them.

The ideal way to go through this Bible study is in a small group with some other girls so you can talk through Hagar's story and the

questions and issues that come up while exploring it. If you choose to do so, I recommend that you complete the assignments on your own each week and then get together to discuss what you have learned.

This Bible study can also be a tool to help you develop a regular quiet time with God each morning or evening. It's a great way to get into God's Word on a daily basis and study a girl whose life is completely relevant to your own. I suggest you set aside a specific time each day (like six thirty every morning, or eight o'clock every night) and commit to doing a portion of this study. That way, you will stay on track to finish studying Hagar's story in six short weeks.

It is my prayer that through your study of Hagar, you'll come to see and understand that God's Word is real and relevant to your life today.

Grace and peace,
Shannon Primicerio

week one

USED!

Sarai, Abram's wife, hadn't yet produced a child. She had an Egyptian maid named Hagar. Sarai said to Abram, "God has not seen fit to let me have a child. Sleep with my maid. Maybe I can get a family from her." Abram agreed to do what Sarai said.

— GENESIS 16:1-2

INTRODUCTIONS AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE **everything**. When we meet someone for the first time, we tend to form opinions about the person within the first several minutes. *She's annoying* or *He's cute*, we think to ourselves. And just as we instantly form opinions of others, we know they will quickly shape opinions about us too. So we go to great lengths to ensure that their opinions of us are nothing but complimentary. More often than not, all first impressions are carried into the second meeting. Some first impressions follow people around for the rest of their lives.

4. What do you try to convey about yourself in a first impression?

In Genesis 16:1, we are introduced to Hagar this way: “[Sarai] had an Egyptian maid named Hagar.” Amazing how one small sentence can say so much.

5. List at least three things you learn about Hagar from this introduction.

6. What images does the word slave conjure up in your mind?

12. Have you ever felt like a Hagar in comparison to a Sarai? Explain.

Back in Genesis 12, before we are ever introduced to Hagar by name, we are given insights into life in Egypt and possibly discover how Hagar came to be Sarai's maid. Read the following passage, Genesis 12:10-20, before proceeding:

Then a famine came to the land. Abram went down to Egypt to live; it was a hard famine. As he drew near to Egypt, he said to his wife, Sarai, "Look. We both know that you're a beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you they're going to say, 'Aha! That's his wife!' and kill me. But they'll let you live. Do me a favor: tell them you're my sister. Because of you, they'll welcome me and let me live."

When Abram arrived in Egypt, the Egyptians took one look and saw that his wife was stunningly beautiful. Pharaoh's princes raved over her to Pharaoh. She was taken to live with Pharaoh.

Because of her, Abram got along very well: he accumulated sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys, *men and women servants*, and camels. But GOD hit Pharaoh hard because of Abram's wife Sarai; everybody in the palace got seriously sick.

Pharaoh called for Abram, "What's this that you've done to me? Why didn't you tell me that she's your wife? Why did you say, 'She's my sister' so that I'd take her as my wife?"

Here's your wife back — take her and get out!”

Pharaoh ordered his men to get Abram out of the country. They sent him and his wife and everything he owned on their way. (Emphasis added)

In a time of famine, Egypt was the land of plenty. People, Abram and Sarai included, went to Egypt to escape want. Although Hagar more than likely came from a family of slaves, she was still surrounded by the finest luxuries. It is believed that prior to Abram and Sarai's visit to Egypt, Hagar was in service somewhere in Pharaoh's palace. Many scholars believe that she was one of the gifts Pharaoh gave Abram in verse 16.¹ Simply put, Hagar was a gift given to Abram and Sarai because Sarai was very beautiful. I don't know about you, but that sure wouldn't make me like Sarai. As if being a slave weren't bad enough, Hagar had to be the slave of a beautiful woman — who *knew* she was beautiful.

I remember some of the girls who were known as the “pretty and popular” ones when I was in junior high and high school. They weren't always the most pleasant to be around. Usually they talked down to others, behaved rudely, and used other people for their own gain. When I was in college, however, I met a girl who had been treated very badly by some of the pretty and popular types when she was in high school. We'll call her Stephanie. She was the type of girl who blossomed overnight, and although her high school days were filled with awkwardness and heartache, she was a real knockout by the time she arrived at college.

When I met Stephanie, I was taken aback by how kind and considerate she was of others. She was always helping a new student find his or her way around campus, and she constantly smiled and said hello to anyone she walked by. She is the type of beautiful that I prefer to be around. But something tells me that Sarai didn't exactly fit into this mold. To top it all off, her name means “princess” to Hagar's “immigrant” or “fugitive.”² Somehow I'm getting the impression that Sarai thought her name fit her very well.

Let's read about some of Sarai's interactions with Hagar in Genesis 16:1-3:

Sarai, Abram's wife, hadn't yet produced a child. She had an Egyptian maid named Hagar. Sarai said to Abram, "God has not seen fit to let me have a child. Sleep with my maid. Maybe I can get a family from her." Abram agreed to do what Sarai said.

So Sarai, Abram's wife, took her Egyptian maid Hagar and gave her to her husband Abram as a wife. Abram had been living ten years in Canaan when this took place.

We've already established that Hagar was introduced to us as Sarai's slave. But in the very same sentence that we see her as a slave, we also see her as something else: a solution. And not just any solution — she was *the* solution to Sarai's problems (or so Sarai thought). Suddenly this slave girl with little value became of extreme importance to Sarai. And Sarai used Hagar to get what she wanted: a son. Without producing an heir (son) for Abram, Sarai was viewed as a worthless wife back in her day. So it was of great significance to her to find a way to have a son, even if it were through the use of a surrogate mother. Not wanting to feel worthless herself, the "princess" used Hagar for her own gain.

13. If you were Hagar, how would you feel about marrying your mistress's husband so that you could produce a child for the two of them?

14. In this situation, do you think Sarai had any regard for Hagar and her feelings? Explain your answer.

15. Describe a modern-day situation in which one girl could use another girl for her own gain.

16. If you have ever been in a situation like the one you described, were you in Sarai's position or Hagar's? Describe how you felt and why you made the choices you did.

17. Why do you think it is sometimes so easy to disregard the feelings of someone else when what we want is at stake?

WORDS TO LIVE BY

In Philippians 2:1-4, the apostle Paul offers some instructions regarding this mentality that are worth memorizing. So grab a pen and a 3x5 card and jot down these verses. Spend this week working on memorizing them.

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you *care* — then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

18. What are some things you sometimes do to “push your way to the front” or “sweet-talk your way to the top”?

19. How can you turn those things around this week and begin to “put yourself aside, and help others get ahead” instead?

AN IMPORTANT TOPIC TO MENTION

I know that not everyone who participates in this Bible study will deal firsthand with the topic I am about to address. But I also know there will be more than a few girls who will. And it is important information for all of us to pay attention to so we can better protect ourselves and help others through difficult situations.

Girls have enough problems being used by other girls who want to manipulate others for their own gain. But there is one problem that may bear even greater consequences down the line, and that is when a girl becomes physically used by a guy. It has been said that “guys will give love for sex, and girls will give sex for love.” In all of my years of ministry, I have, unfortunately, found that statement to be true.

I’m almost certain that I am writing to four categories of girls right now: those who have never been physically intimate with a guy in any way and wouldn’t dream of it before marriage, those who have had some sort of physical involvement with a guy and now regret it, those who are currently in a relationship in which they are being too intimate with a guy, and those who are toying with the idea of taking a relationship to the next level in physical intimacy. Please note that

I do not exclusively mean sex when I say physical involvement. There are kisses and other touches that can be extremely intimate. In fact, there are prayers and spiritual conversations that can be shared that are far more intimate than any physical contact. So it's a good idea for those of you who aren't physical with a guy to pay attention too.

As girls, it is in our very nature to nurture those we love. We're affectionate creatures at the core. For example, when a group of your friends arrives at a gathering, I am sure that all of the girls usually run up and hug each other, whereas the guys might hang back from the crowd a little and look around awkwardly (unless they are hugging the girls). For some reason, most guys get weirded out when it comes to hugging other guys. But girls don't have that problem. So it is only natural for us, when we get into a relationship with a guy we care deeply about, to want to express our affection for him on a level that is different from the affection we express to our friends. *If I hug my friends and they're just my friends, I need to do something else with this guy to show him I feel differently about him*, we rationalize. But that mentality almost always has costly consequences.

Anytime you give a piece of your heart or your body to a guy you are not married to, you are giving away something you will never get back to a guy who hasn't promised that he will stay (and a promise isn't a promise until there is a ring on your finger and you have said your vows). In most cases, relationships that turn physical before the wedding day never make it to a wedding day. And those that do create problems in intimacy that a couple will have to work through at a later time.

For most of us, intimacy doesn't stop in the physical realm. Most of us tend to be talkers too. And because we are talkers, we love to divulge all kinds of personal information about ourselves — dreams, goals, aspirations — to anyone willing to listen. So sometimes we openly share our hearts with a guy we are interested in, and before we know it he gets freaked out and runs off, leaving us feeling betrayed and defiled. I know this because I was once one of the girls I just described. In my four years of high school, I had only one serious crush. We were friends, and we talked a lot — on the phone, in

person, sometimes even paired off when a big group of our friends was hanging out. And then one day he was gone. Without any warning, he fell for another girl and left me nursing a broken heart and wishing I hadn't told him so much about my dreams. It took a long time for me to get over the pain. In the end of that friendship, I felt very used. Looking back I can see that I was just the girl this guy hung out with until someone better came along. For years I felt as if I was the only one who had experienced this.

Then I became an author and the e-mails started piling in. They ranged from the physical, "I lost my virginity at fourteen and now I feel worthless and used up," to the spiritual, "My boyfriend and I prayed and did devotions together every day, and then out of the blue he broke up with me and now I feel so lost," to the confused, "I have this boyfriend, but he's not really my boyfriend although he acts like he is." When about the twentieth e-mail came, I realized I was far from alone.

In my book *Being a Girl Who Leads*, I devote one entire chapter to guarding your heart emotionally and spiritually in friendships and other relationships with guys, and another chapter to protecting your purity in those same relationships. If this section has somehow struck a nerve with you, I suggest you pick up a copy of that book for further study.

Feeling used is never fun, but it is never more devastating than when you feel as if you have given a part of yourself to someone who didn't care enough to stick around. For those of you who haven't yet been in that situation, please, please be careful. Do not share parts of yourself that you want to preserve (and that God wants you to preserve) for marriage. And for those of you who feel as if it is already too late for you, please know that God delights in restoring those of us who have made mistakes, and He delights in working through us again. Throughout Hagar's story, we will see that both Sarai and Hagar became women who played great roles in the plans of a God who loved them both dearly. That can be your future too if you will choose to make some changes.

Talk with a youth leader or trusted adult and confess the

baggage you are carrying. Pray with that leader and ask God for forgiveness. Then correct the areas that need changing. You are not alone in all of this.

If your issue goes much deeper than that and you have been a victim of rape or sexual abuse, please ask a trusted adult to get you connected with professional counseling. You do not need to be ashamed of what has happened to you. Please go and seek wholeness and restoration for yourself.

Because we are all at different places in this area, the next few questions are going to be more open-ended than most. Please answer them as they pertain to you.

20. What are some ways in which you never want to feel used?

21. How can you prevent those things from happening?

22. What are some areas in your life where you realize you need to make a conscious effort to protect yourself from being used by a boy? (For example, in conversations with a guy you have a crush on, or in physical boundaries with your boyfriend.) Be specific about how you need to protect yourself.
23. If you feel that you've been used by someone, it is important to get help so you can heal from all you have been through. Name one safe adult in your life whom you can talk to.

Setting standards is important in your relationships with the opposite sex. You can't wait until you are in a situation to figure out how you are going to handle it. If you do, your emotions might lead you astray. When my husband and I were dating, we decided we would never be alone together. For us this meant we would be in a car together only if we were on a public street driving to a public destination. This way, we weren't alone since people we knew could drive by and look in the windows at any minute. If we went out to dinner, just the two of us, we weren't really alone because we were surrounded by other people. If we were at my house, my parents were home and awake, and we were in the living room knowing they could walk in on us at any minute. Knowing that people could always

see what we were doing kept us accountable in ways we desperately needed. Our definition of *not alone* might seem broad to some, but it worked for us. We were able to build a relationship outside the atmosphere of a group (which is important in a relationship moving toward marriage), but we also had a safe environment that kept us out of trouble. It is important to note that my husband and I were both in our early twenties when we started dating, so these standards aren't reserved for when you are in high school.

24. Write out a list of standards that will be your own personal Code of Conduct for relationships with the opposite sex. Once you have completed it, copy it onto another sheet of paper and give it to a friend who can hold you accountable. Because I think it is important, I filled in the first answer on your list for you.

a. I will never be alone (outside of a public place) with a guy who is not a family member. (This will save you more trouble than you can even imagine.)

b.

c.

d.

e.

Talking It Out

The God who loved us so much that He sent His only Son to die for us will never use or abandon us the way some people will. If Hagar's story offers us any hope, it is this: God is willing to chase us down and wrap us in His love when we feel used and begin running scared. Write out a prayer right now thanking God for His fervent love for you.

Used!

Writing It Down

Jot down a few things that really stood out to you in this week's lesson. Make sure to note why those things stuck out to you.

Setting a Higher Standard

List one new goal you have for yourself as a result of this week's lesson. Make it a specific goal and then break it down into smaller, easier-to-read steps. (For instance, "My goal is to protect myself from being used by guys in the future. I will start by setting some standards for those relationships.") Put today's date next to your goal so you can come back and check your progress in a few months.