

# UNLIKELY HEROES



## Opening Prayer

God of Unlikely Heroes,  
You are, indeed, a living God who longs to reveal in wisdom and in truth. You long for relationships of righteousness. You desire for Your people to be transformed by Your grace. Lord, we admit we do not always trust Your provision. By Your Spirit, help us to have courage and conviction to walk in faith with You. Like Hagar, help us to become a people whose lives proclaim Your story and witness to Your love. Form us as Your disciples, so that we might be instruments of Your will and grow ever closer to You. For this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

## Scripture: Genesis 16:1-16 and Genesis 21:1-21

- *Have someone read scripture passages aloud.*
- *Allow time for silence to read on your own.*
- *Highlight key words, phrases, images that speak to you.*
- *Take a few moments to share those with a partner or with the entire group.*

## Background

### Hagar (*Hay´gahr*)

Hagar is known to us as the Egyptian maidservant whom Sarah gave to Abraham as his concubine; she bore him Ishmael. There are two stories concerning Hagar, both showing the rivalry between her and Sarah. These stories were meant to show that Ishmael's descendants, the Bedouins living to the south of the Israelites, were of the same stock as the Hebrews, but from a religiously less important branch of the family. The inferiority of Hagar and Ishmael is used allegorically in the New Testament by Paul in Galatians 4:21-31.

Hagar is revered as a matriarch by many African American Christians, who find resonances between her enslavement, sexual abuse, and ultimate liberation (including her thwarted first attempt) and the experiences of enslaved African women in the Americas and Caribbean. And though not mentioned in the Quran, in Islam Hagar (Hajar) is the mother of Abraham's (Ibrahim's) promised heir. A portion of her wilderness flight is commemorated annually by pilgrims during the Hajj.

—Wil Gafney  
Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible,  
Brite Divinity School

## Reflect

•Take a few moments to respond to the questions below. Share with one another as partners or the whole group.

## Digging into Genesis 16

1. Of the three main characters in this story—Abram\*, Sarai\* and Hagar—which do you like the most? The least? Why?
2. What might change your opinion of Abram and Sarai: (a) Knowing it was a common cultural practice in their day for childless couples to include as their own any children the man had by his servants (read slaves)? (b) Knowing their attitude and motives are right toward God? (c) Knowing Sarai is 77 and has always been unable to bear children? (d) Knowing it's been ten years since God promised them a son?
3. What, if anything, might justify the strategy of surrogate motherhood and “helping out nature?”
4. Why does God reject their plan? How does God comfort Hagar (especially in verse 7-12)?

## Applying the Word to our Discipleship

1. Where have you been waiting “10 year” for God to fulfill a promise? How do you cope with delay?
2. From what are you tempted to run?
3. Where have you seen God lately? And from that encounter, what name would you give to God to the place where you met God (as in 16:13-14)?

## Digging into Genesis 21

1. As God fulfills the promise of an heir to Abram and Sarai, how might Hagar and Ishmael be feeling?
2. From Sarah's perspective (verses 9 and following), why must Hagar and Ishmael be sent away?
3. Likewise from God's perspective (verse 21)
4. How is Abraham's distress due to his past choices (verse 11) Two sons? Two mothers?
5. Outside of God's covenant promise to Abraham, what does Hagar receive instead? Why? (look at verses 12-13) What does this reveal about God?

## Applying the Word to our Discipleship

1. Like Hagar, where do you need God's comforting?
2. Like Hagar, where do you need to trust God to fulfill God's promises for the future?

\*God changed Abram's name to Abraham in Genesis 17:5 and Sarai to Sarah in Genesis 17:15