

Chapter 1: Hagar

Theme

Endure

Centering Practice by Kalila Volkov

Deep Breaths...

For this one moment All is perfect

I have breath!

Divine life fills me

I need nothing but to know the Now

Where my heart celebrates and my soul rejoices.

Overflowing with serenity

I rest in the rich fullness of being still

To simply be is ecstasy.

Devotional Reading by Martha Blacklock, Mother Thunder Mission, New York City Taken from SoulWeavings...A Gathering of Women's Prayers

"A wandering Aramean was my mother.

In Egypt she bore slaves.

Then she called to the God of our mothers. Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah.

Praise God who hears, forever.

A warrior, judge, and harlot was my mother. God used her from 5me to 5me.

She gave what she gave and was willing. Rahab, Jael, Deborah, Judith, Tamar.

Praise God who takes, forever.

A Galilean virgin was my mother.

She bore our Life and Hope.

And a sword pierced her own soul, also. Mary, blessed among women, mother of God.

Praise God who loves, forever.

A witness to Christ's rising was my mother

What angels said, she told.

The apostles thought it was an idle tale.

Mary, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, women with them.

Praise God who lives, forever.

A faithful Christian woman was my mother. A mystic. Martyr. Saint.

May we, with her, in every generation, Julian, Perpetua, Clare, Hilda.

Praise God who made us,

Praise God who saved us,

Praise God who keeps us all forever. Amen."

Powerpoint Slide: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Wkl2YocUX2MBRlvWhye3icqh5ZfGM-rm/view?usp=sharing>

Video

Linda Bales Todd introduces the author Katey Zeh. Katey discusses why and how she wrote *Women Rise Up*.

<https://vimeo.com/527878637>

Hagar's Story

Definition of "Endure" – suffer patiently something painful or difficult; or live through; experience; remain in existence; last; abide, bear, stand, and tolerate. This is a word that can point to situations of great stress and hardship OR can point to the positive life journeys – enduring love, our commitment to each other has endured. In some respects, Hagar's experience is one of both –

Let's listen to the text....

Genesis 12:10-20

This text is part of the back story prior to the time Hagar came into the picture. Abram's treatment of Sarai seems cruel and disrespectful – women were considered property and Abram was buying into that practice and claiming his power over her. He "gives" Sarai to Pharaoh and, as Katey writes, we can only imagine what happened when Sarai was in his control. We need to remember that Abram's actions were not God inspired. There is no part of the text indicating that this was part of God's doing.

The commentary in the *Common English Bible* states that this incident develops out of two social realities of the day: marginalization of immigrants who were viewed as "the other"/ "less than" with no power and the second reality was male dominance in most sectors of life. Sarai and Abram were visiting Egypt. Not their home. So, according to the commentary, Abram's actions could be viewed as a survival strategy in a foreign land. In fact, Abram states that directly to Sarai: "When the Egyptians see you, they will say 'This is his wife' and they will kill me and let you live. So, tell them you are my sister so that they will treat me well for your sake, and I will survive because of you!"

Regardless of the cultural context, this act of betrayal could not have endeared Sarai to Abram due to his exploitation of her. The phrase Katey uses is "**if you love me, you'll do this for me!**" A common phrase used in ancient days as well as today. This phrase is applicable to cases of domestic violence...guilt tripping that, for many abusers, is quite effective.

Sarai's forced labor benefited Abram and, in this case, she was an innocent victim. Sarai was caught in the web of sexual slavery not unlike millions of women around the globe. Today there are between 20-40 million people in slavery today – sexual slavery and slave labor.

The final deal Pharaoh made with Abram before expelling him, was the gift of Hagar as Abram's slave to take with him amongst other "things" Abram had acquired. Let's read on...

Genesis 16:1-16

This Biblical story is filled with all sorts of "issues" to address: slavery, role of women and motherhood, betrayal, human trafficking, multiple wives, faith. Interesting that Sarai blames

God for her not being pregnant. One has to wonder if she felt God was punishing her in some way – perhaps for the transactions that happened when under Pharaoh's thumb.

Pregnancy was – and still is in some cultures – a key role for women, a definer of her worth and a guarantee of descendants which were important in that day and this day. That cultural message was not lost on Sarai. She was bereft. Desperate. Her age was against her. Time was running out. So, she uses Hagar to fulfill her dream of having children. Hagar was a surrogate, a concubine – actually another wife of Abram's.

So, after Hagar became pregnant, Sarai was upset, to say the least, when Hagar “turned on her” so to speak. And, then, Sarai turned against Hagar. Katey writes: “It would be tempting for us to villainize her for this inhumane treatment of Hagar. Sarai is acting selfishly and heartlessly. But she also is acting from a place of woundedness...she must feel powerless over her own body and life, and so she directs all of her fear, all of her rage, and all of her resentment towards Hagar, the one person in her life who holds less power than she does.”

As Katey points out in the chapter, Sarai, having been oppressed, becomes the oppressor. This is similar to perpetrators of domestic violence – many abusers were themselves abused. And, one can point to the Israeli/Palestinian situation as well. Katey quote: “When women cannot see their own humanity, they are not able to see the humanity of other women.”

Hagar eventually flees into the wilderness. And, according to Delores Williams, an American Presbyterian theologian notable for her role in the development of womanist theology, Hagar is ‘the first female in the Bible to liberate herself from oppressive power structures.’ But then, God asks her to return to her mistress, to Sarai, her abuser. (We cringe at this knowing she is returning to an abusive situation, because we know returning to an abuser can result in great damage, if not death.) And, as Delores Williams says, God was no liberator in this story! We don't know why God wanted her to return except to produce more offspring for Abraham, but we do know that Hagar endures and is obedient to God. And, when she is talking with God, Hagar gives God a new name “El-Roi” – the first person in the Bible to do so and to also speak God's new name.

We know the rest of the story. Hagar births Ishmael. Years later, Sarai finally has her own son, Isaac. Deep jealousy between Ishmael and Isaac ensues which results in Abram casting out Hagar and Ishmael into the wilderness where she endures more hardship. *God heard her cries* and provided for her. As God promised, Hagar lived to see her son grow up, marry, have children, and become a ruler of a great nation.

When God spoke to Hagar, she knew she was loved. She is redeemed, and is a survivor which is the term used for persons healing from domestic violence. Hagar endured.

Social Issue

A social issue named in this chapter is human trafficking – an issue addressed by United Methodist Women. Human trafficking, like domestic violence, is all about power and control. However, in human trafficking, the perpetrator uses fraud, coercion and manipulation and usually transports victims from place to place. Another phrase used for human trafficking is “modern-day slavery”. In both these stories, we witness this.

Break Out Session

Question for discussion: *How does Hagar's story of endurance speak to your life and why is it important for the world to know about Hagar?*

Reporting Out

Have the groups report on their small group discussion as time allows.

Closing

May the love of God watch over you,
May the peace of Christ fill your heart;
May the presence of the Holy Spirit give you courage to endure and to love with abandon
knowing you are sacred in the sight of God. Amen.

This session was created by Linda Bales Todd