

# Sermon Starter – Broken Commitment, Vision Renewed

*Genesis 21:1-3, 8-20*

This is a hard story to read, a troubling story. Abraham, the patriarch of our faith—this great follower of God—kicks his own child out of his camp. These were nomadic, desert people who moved from place to place as a large clan, and the clan protected them from all the other things that call the desert their home. It was in that clan unit that you had food, shelter, water, and safety. And Abraham sends Hagar out, away from their clan. He sends her away—the mother of his child, a woman he has been intimate with, a woman who has been under his protection for years—out of the protection of their clan. Hagar and Abraham’s relationship has become broken; the relationship between father Abraham and his son Ishmael has all of a sudden changed dramatically, and they will never interact as father and son in the same way again.

We probably all have a family story like this of some sort, a story of a broken promise, of a parent favoring one child, or a father not fulfilling his duties. These are stories of broken commitments or relationships, or of a family member who suddenly becomes an outcast, creating a fractured family. This story of Hagar and Abraham, though it is difficult to hear, is one to which we can relate.

So Hagar wandered in the wilderness, not sure where to go or what to do. After her water ran out, she laid Ishmael under a bush, not being able to look at him as he died from dehydration in the desert. But as Ishmael’s name tells us, “God hears our cries” of distress. God sends an angel to attend to her and give her two things. First, he meets her immediate need for water. Second, and most important, God gives Hagar a vision for life outside of Abraham’s clan: God tells her, “I will make a great nation of Ishmael.” He gives her a vision for the future, a vision for a new life.

Often a fractured relationship is one of the most difficult and painful things to bear. We are forced to envision life in a way we never expected. We have pictured our life in a particular way—a vision that has led us, a vision by which we have made our life decisions, a vision with a particular spouse or within a particular family unit, a vision of us working at a particular job, or living on a specific piece of land. Suddenly we are forced to picture an alternative reality: our lives without that foundational commitment or covenant relationship. Most of us are not prepared to picture our life in such a way, without husband or wife, without mother or father, without communication from a particular family member, without a particular career, without our land, without our house.

But “God hears.” God enters the picture and issues a new covenant with Hagar. In doing so, God provides her with a vision for what life might look like outside of her relationship with Abraham: “I will make a great nation of Ishmael.” I believe that this new vision for life empowers Hagar to find her way out of the desert. This vision allows her to slowly, gradually start living into a new promise of a different life. It’s not a life she had ever wanted, not one she had ever pictured, but a vision from which someday she might be able to again live . . . even flourish.

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