

# A time of little things

*12 Stories Of Women In The Bible and One Woman Today*

Hagar



NOT THE FORMER THINGS | DIFFERENT BY DESIGN

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# GETTING STARTED

Welcome to the first month of our year long, monthly study. Our approach will be the same each month, designed to be simple and personal.

1. Woman in the Bible
2. Me
3. Research and Commentary
4. You

**We begin with Hagar.**

NEED PRAYER? HAVE QUESTIONS?

*Please feel free to email me directly.*

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# HAGAR

We find the story of Hagar in **Genesis 16:1-16** and in **Genesis 21:8-21**.

We learn in Genesis 16 that Hagar is an Egyptian slave to Abraham and his wife Sarah. She was likely given as a gift to them from Pharaoh when they previously spent time in Egypt.

God promised Abraham that he and Sarah would have a baby together and form a family that ultimately becomes the Jewish people, and the lineage of Jesus. But Sarah was likely around 65 years old. You can understand that Sarah is struggling to trust this promise.

She really, really wants a child and in her fear, she offers Hagar to Abraham in the hopes she would conceive. It's very Handmaid's Tale and, although this was commonplace and legal at the time, it still means that Hagar has no say so in the matter. To further illustrate how powerless she is, any child she conceives will legally be Sarah's.

Not only that, but Sarah resents Hagar and is abusive. Hagar runs away from the abuse and is met by The Angel of The Lord.

I was shocked to learn as I did the research that **The Angel of The Lord is likely Jesus**. Most Bible commentaries agree that when we read THE instead of AN angel of the Lord, it is the pre-incarnate Jesus.

Hagar validates this theory when she responds as if she is meeting God himself.

**This means that the first time we learn of Jesus interacting with a human being, it is a woman.** Not only that, an immigrant, an oppressed slave with no agency of her own – a broken down, busted up, abused woman with absolutely no real power or options.

**She calls Him El Roi or “The one who sees.”**

Hagar is the only character in the Bible who gives God a name based on her personal experience with the Divine.

Abraham and Sarah never call Hagar by name. She is just “the servant girl.”

**But God calls her by name.** The world sees Hagar as a slave and foreigner, but God looks at her as a person, a woman whom he has called for his divine purposes. Abraham and Sarah may have looked at her as an expedient way to have children, but God sees her differently. He knows her. He sees her real situation, and cares for her.

And in his care – he sends her back to the mess. Back to the fear and the pain.

**And. She. Goes.**

She trusts this God who sees her, right where she is in the mess of her own life.

In **Genesis 21**, we meet Hagar again. Her son is now around 13 years old and she has been cast out of the house.

**Abraham sends her away for good with very little to survive on her own, much less to take care of her child.**

JANUARY

*Hagar*

She is in the desert and homeless.

Alone, desperate, and out of water, she knows that her son is going to die of thirst.

It's so terrifyingly painful, she can't watch.

She places her little boy a ways away from her, so she doesn't have to watch him die.

She begins to wail and cry out.

Then, the Divine calls to Hagar: "Do not be afraid. God has heard the boy crying." The angel reminds Hagar of God's blessing and then shows her the next step.

Turns out, when God opens her eyes to really see, there is a well of water right there, waiting for her to draw water from it and live.

**Your Notes On Hagar's Story**



JANUARY

*Hagar*

# ME

I've spent most of my life afraid.

When I was a girl, I was afraid of a lot of really big things.

I remember a time when I couldn't sleep and had, what I now know to be, an anxiety attack at my grandma's house in the middle of the night. I was worried that the house would catch fire and I would need to somehow get my three younger siblings out without us all burning to death.

**I was 11.**

My childhood memories include about a million episodes like this, interspersed between the math tests, the pool parties, the birthday cakes, and the debate team practices.

When my first child was born, in the weeks following our return home from the hospital, I became increasingly agoraphobic. I had this beautiful, sweet-smelling baby and I was terrified I wouldn't be able to protect us out in the big, open world.

**I was 29.**

My motherhood has often been defined by my fears.

JANUARY

*Hagar*

What if he never learns to read? What if the doctors don't figure out how to help? What if I mess them both up and totally fail at being their mom?

If you have been reading my writing over the past year, you also know the story of what happened with my husband in 2019.

**I was 45.**

After that, it was like a layer of cold, dark fear covered everything.

What if he leaves me? How will I support myself and my children? What will we do about medical insurance?

And the deepest fears.

What if he doesn't love me? What if I am abandoned and alone? What if I was wrong to trust him, to love him? What if I really am not worth fighting for and loving, no matter what life brings?

**Then, all my worst fears came true. It all happened, just as I'd feared.**

The fear I experienced felt exactly the same as a dark, numbing fear years earlier, when my youngest son almost died.

**I was 42.**

My child was very, very ill, suffering from potential organ failure and a life threatening reaction to medications prescribed the previous week. Because of hospital rules and his condition, I was not allowed to stay with him overnight. (Please, do not get me started on hospital rules.)

JANUARY

*Hagar*

I was absolutely terrified. I was also incredibly loved.

My closest friends took me to a quiet place for dinner. They ordered me a little food and an alcoholic beverage. They listened to me and cried with me. They pitched in and paid for a hotel room for me for the week so I could be near the hospital. They even brought me new, soft pajamas and a cozy blanket.

I felt so much love from them and from God for sending them. But when I got to that hotel room, all I could think about was my son, alone.

As a mother, it was the worst night of my life. The next morning, I woke very early and began to pray for help to just survive the day ahead.

Desperate, I grabbed my bible and the Spirit led me to the story of Hagar.

**I'm 50 now.**

My very worst fears have come true.

He did leave.

I have to support myself and my children.

I wasn't worth fighting for and loving no matter what.

I am terrified about what happens once the divorce is final and my children, both chronic, and one with life threatening, medical conditions lose medical insurance.

It all happened.



JANUARY

*Hagar*

My worst, most terrifying fears materialized, one by one, week after week, over the course of 4 months last year.

It began with him leaving, but with promises to care for us and support us, even as he began his new single life.

4 months later, he wouldn't even return my calls.

He left me. Alone. With two children with dynamic needs. With very little support or regard for our well-being.

And, it turns out, it's nowhere near as bad as I feared.

It's not that bad. I'm actually OK.

Why?

**Because I am Hagar, and even though I can't see it most of the time, I know the well is there.**

Although I have been tempted at times to hide my children, give up and just sob until we all die, there has been well after well after well to nourish and sustain us, as we walk into the unknown stretch of desert ahead.

For this month's study, I decided to make a list of all the "wells" I've found relief in and nourishment from this year.

**This is what Hagar's well has looked like for me this past year:**

- Wonderful clients and even friends who have given more and more opportunities to earn an income. They've also been incredibly gracious when I struggled in my personal life and was not able to perform at the same level. (Seriously, I work for some of the kindest, most honorable people I know. Email me if you want a list so you can look into using their products and supporting small businesses who truly know what it is to do the right thing.)
- A trauma informed therapist
- A paid for, move-out cleaning housekeeper for our family home when my son and I were moving out and I could not stop crying.
- A bathtub, filled with warm water to soothe my anxiety.
- Walks each morning, with random hummingbirds and butterflies fluttering by
- Medication to soothe my anxiety when it becomes too overwhelming.
- Beautiful, loving women who listen to me wail and rage, and then send me sweet messages of encouragement along with Starbucks and Visa gift cards, handymen to help me around the house, and even brand new AirPods when my left earbud dropped into my coffee and no longer worked.
- A ring, with my birthstone, my children's birthstones, and my friends' birthstones surrounding ours, a gift from my ride or die group of women. I wear it in place of my wedding ring – a reminder that I am still loved and never alone.

My fear can't compete with this list of good, loving, true things – and this is just the short list. I could add more and more bullet points from the past month alone, but we'd be here a lifetime.

Because the list never ends.

I know now, the well is always there.

# RESEARCH AND COMMENTARY

As I read the various commentaries available about Hagar, I was surprised at how few of them focused on her.

Many seemed committed to primarily defending Abraham and Sarah, making sure to repeatedly note that this form of “surrogacy” was common at the time.

Most were about the contrast between Hagar and Sarah, with Sarah ultimately being portrayed as the hero, most holy, and in some, the one God truly loves best.

This is actually fair commentary, as much as it infuriates me. Paul makes the same comparison in Galatians 4:24.

*“The son by a slave woman was conceived the normal way, but the son by the free woman was conceived through a promise.”*

Paul’s allegory continues the contrast between the two, with the conclusion that Sarah is the one clearly the most favored by God.

I have no desire to argue with bible scholars (and Paul himself for that matter). What do I know?

I will simply say this – **I identify with and have found more grace and love in the story of Hagar than I ever will Sarah.**

There was one commentary that, in my opinion and with my lived experience, better captured the magnitude of Hagar’s story.

JANUARY

*Hagar*

*“The angel’s annunciation to Hagar is similar to announcements to Hannah, to the mother of Samuel, and to Mary the mother of Jesus: all would have children with special destinies, and all are addressed personally, not through their husbands.”*

[chabad.org](http://chabad.org)

Here, we see a comparison between Hagar and Mary, the mother of Jesus.

They both experience the God of the universe profoundly, personally, as women – without a husband.

This is much closer to what I believe is the intrinsic value of Hagar’s story. It’s why I wanted to share it with you this month.

**Your Notes:**



JANUARY

*Hagar*

# YOU


Our study this year is about the individual women of the bible and their individual stories, and, perhaps most importantly, how these individual women can influence our own lives and personal connection to The Divine.

**I've shared my own reflections. Now, it's your turn.**

The story of Hagar is riddled with complex dynamics. Slavery, sexual abuse, being the outcast, struggling to care for a child - the list could go on.

***What is the story of Hagar stirring up in you?*** 

God saves Hagar twice - once by sending her back to literal slavery and, again, by opening her eyes to the well right there beside her.

***What are some examples in your own life of needing to "go back" to something difficult and even tragic, because it was right at the time? What good eventually came of that time?*** 

## HAGAR'S WELL IN YOUR LIFE

Make a list of the wells surrounding you right now, no matter how difficult it may be to perceive them.

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### KEY TAKEAWAYS

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### MORE WELLS IN MY LIFE

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# JANUARY REFLECTIONS

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

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## MORE WELLS IN MY LIFE

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# I AM SO GLAD YOU ARE HERE!

Thank you for doing this with me, this month, and hopefully, all year long.



Wishing you a January filled with goodness, love and so many unexpected, much needed wells.

*With so much love,  
Shawna*

*“I do not understand the mystery of grace -- only that  
it meets us where we are and does not leave us where  
it found us.”*

ANNE LAMOTT