

You're a Fixer-Upper: I Hurt!

A sermon based on Genesis 16:1-11 – ***“Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; ² so she said to Abram, “The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.”***

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. ³ So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress.⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me.”

⁶ “Your slave is in your hands,” Abram said. “Do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

⁷ The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. ⁸ And he said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?”

“I’m running away from my mistress Sarai,” she answered.

⁹ Then the angel of the Lord told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.” ¹⁰ The angel added, “I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.”

¹¹ The angel of the Lord also said to her:

***“You are now pregnant
and you will give birth to a son.
You shall name him Ishmael,
for the Lord has heard of your misery.”***

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It hurt.

I was standing in a member’s home – this was years ago. We were having a light-hearted chat before dinner, and the topic came up...kids. And then the comment, “So, when are you gonna start having some kids? You know, you got that big house...lots of room for lots of kids.” If only he had known our struggles.

To be fair, he wasn't the only one who ever said that...wasn't even the first...certainly wasn't the last. But, no matter how many times I jokingly responded with, "no, lots of room for lots of stuff," I'll admit, it stung. It hurt. I hurt.

Or, after we adopted Mara, the conversations somewhat quickly turned towards, "When are you going to get another? Mara needs a sibling!" Or, "So, are you going to have children of your own now?"

And it's like the scab being torn off. It hurt. I hurt.

Becoming and being part of the adoption community now, Becky and I have learned there is a right and a wrong way to talk about adoption. There's a right and a wrong way to talk to people who want children but are struggling with infertility. And, the examples I'm sharing – while I wholeheartedly believe the people who spoke them meant no ill-will at all – I'll tell you those examples are not the best way to talk to someone who knows or who's going through that struggle.

Now, I'm not here to shame any of you if you've said something like that before. I've been guilty, too. But it shows what we all know...what maybe you learned way back when you were only a few years old and your parents taught you the catchy, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." That's not true. Living as broken people in a broken world filled with broken people, you and I know this...

Words hurt.

People hurt.

Words hurt people.

People hurt people.

People hurt people they love.

People hurt people they love with their words.

And this isn't new. In our first lesson, we saw a family and three main characters – Abram and Sarai, whom you know well. And then there was Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant. Probably not as familiar with her, but briefly, servants or slaves back then would have been a lot different than the violent slavery we think of in America's past. These servants lived with the family, helped with chores around the house or farm, and in exchange, Abram offered protection, food, housing. He was kind to them. He cared for them. They were "part of the family," part of the household.

But, for all the servants Abram and Sarai had - like sons and daughters to them - they didn't have any biological sons or daughters. And if you've ever struggled with having children, that's hard. It hurt. They hurt.

Now, they did have hope. If you go back to Genesis 15, just ten years earlier God promised Abram and Sarai they would have a child. It was God's whole "count stars...your descendants will equal them." God promised Abram he would have a son, who in turn would have children. God promised that from his descendants the Savior of the world would come...Jesus.

That's positive. That's hopeful. That was also 10 years ago.

Waiting 10 years for anything is hard. It's even harder when Abraham was now 85 years old, and Sara 75. So, what do you think happened? Their trust began to waver. Was it going to happen? Where they ever going to have a child?

Finally, Sarai had enough. Forget God's promise...his plan. Look at her plan: ***"The Lord has kept me from having children. Go; sleep with my servant; perhaps I can build a family through her."***

Do you sense the desperation? Her idea was simply, "Go, have sex with that attractive employee of ours; then, I can be an adoptive mother of sorts." You see, that was actually rather customary in society in her day, where a barren wife was allowed to give her servant girl to her husband, with the understanding that any children born of that relationship would belong to the mistress of the household.

But even with that, what do you think? Good idea?

There are a lot of morals lacking in today's world – but just about everyone – including non-believers and non-church goers would agree cheating on your spouse is NOT a good idea. It's morally reprehensible; it hurts trust. It causes all kinds of pain. Even cheating on your boyfriend isn't good! I remember seeing a clip on Facebook from the TV show *Bachelor in Paradise* – not exactly the moral pinnacle of life – and one of the reality stars was upset the boy she had been dating for 2 days was caught kissing another woman.

2 days...and it was only a kiss. How much more pain is there after years of marriage with a lot more than kissing?

To be fair – God was in agreement. Way back at the beginning of the world God said, ***"For this reason a man will be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).*** Because this sleeping together is an extremely intimate thing. God's plan was for it to only be with one other person.

Yet Sarai suggests they go against God's plan. Sarai suggests they take matters into their own hands. Sarai suggests Abram sleep with her employee.

Abram doesn't stop her. Abram doesn't say, "This will drive us apart." Abram doesn't say, "But I am a one-woman kind of guy and you are my one woman." Nope. Essentially, he says, "Cool." And he did it. And Hagar got pregnant.

And there was much rejoicing?!? Nope. Guess how things turned out.

Hagar started to feel special when it came to Abram. She viewed him at the very least as the baby daddy...maybe even her "sorta" husband. He wasn't. Sarai was Abram's wife. Nothing could change that.

And that hurt. Hagar hurt. Because she had been used. So, what then? She can't be his wife, that hurts, so she helps herself feel better by rubbing her motherhood in the face of Sarai. Can you imagine it? "I am so glad I get to be a mother, aren't you? Oh...wait...that's right." "Oh, sorry Sarai, I can't join you for a glass of wine – the baby." "Isn't Abram so nice? He's so big, strong, muscular, and...oh, is that making you uncomfortable?"

In response, Sarai comes running to Abram: ***"You jerk! Abram, you are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me."***

Notice she doesn't blame herself for coming up with and encouraging the idea. She blames Abram – and don't get me wrong, he is to blame. And while, in Scripture, this is only one sentence, I imagine this conversation went on for a while. Sarai yelling at Abram. Abram getting defensive. Sarai saying, "You never listen to me." Abram saying, "You always do this."

Until eventually Abram has had enough. And he tells Sarai – "Do whatever you want with her."

So...she did. "**Sarai mistreated [Hagar].**" Maybe physically. At least verbally. "Oh, there's that (insert female name for other females that sleep around). Were you off sleeping with the rancher? IS that why you're late?"

The emotional toll is so great the result is this: "**Hagar fled from her.**" She fled from her household...from her friends...from her family.

Does this sound at all similar to your family story? Maybe not the not having children and sleeping with someone else in order to have a child part, but the circular hurt part?

Because pay attention to the cycle: Abram and Sarai are hurt; so, they use Hagar and hurt her. Hagar is hurt. So, she hurts Sarai. Sarai is hurt so she hurts Abram. Abram is hurt so he gives Sarai permission to hurt Hagar. And he hurts her in the process, too. Hagar is hurt – so she hurts them both and runs away with Abram's baby in tow. One gets hurt by another. One hurts the other. And the other who gets hurt, hurts them back. It's an ugly cyclical.

And now we see it...hurting others never fixes hurt. It only increases it.

Yet that's how we act in families, isn't it! "If I call my sister that name, I feel less hurt." "If I look at this porn, I'll probably hurt my wife, but I'll feel less hurt for a moment." "If I text mom that I don't love her anymore, I'll feel less hurt." "If I flirt with this coworker, my husband might be hurt, but good – I'll feel better if he knows what it feels like." Even something like, "I know exactly what to say to irritate my wife or set my sibling off or hurt my parent's heart, but hey, I feel better."

You see it, don't you? Where I hurt, so then my solution, I hurt...you...and I don't hurt anymore.

Except it doesn't work like that.

That'd be like somebody throwing a kickball in your face from about 3 feet away. It would hurt. And so, in order to stop the hurt, you throw a kickball at their face. Do you feel better? Not at all.

Hurting others in your family does not help the hurt in your heart. It only brings more hurt.

And ultimately? It hurts God. It's sin. It hurts God and your relationship with God. Because now you feel guilt. Now you feel far apart from God. Now the devil starts to make you question if you are worthy of God's love. And suddenly, the other person isn't the only one who's hurt. Because the truth is, hurting others also hurts you.

That's true for all of us. When we take an honest look at our families, it's like Chip and Joanne (from Fixer Upper) pulling away the dividers hiding the re-finished home, but for ours, it doesn't look finished because there's a new problem springing up or the same old maintenance issue remains. Every one of our families is a fixer-upper...a broken family...a household dealing with hurt.

And it hurts. I hurt. You hurt.

Thankfully, God sees your hurt. You might have been very hurt by your family...by your spouse...by your ex...by your son...your daughter...your sister...your brother...your mom...your dad. You might feel like no one understands. You might feel like no one cares. You might feel all alone dealing with this hurt.

That's how Hagar felt. Sarai hated her. Abram hated her. She felt used and abused and totally alone in this hurt.

So, she snuck out at night...put a few of her belongings into a sack...ran as fast as her pregnant legs could carry her outside of the camp to the desert. She sobs. She hits the grounds. She wets the dry sand with her tears. No one loved her. Everyone used her. No one cared about her pain.

And as she sat there in the darkness of the early morning hours, she felt a darkness overcome her soul that seems impenetrable...until...she saw the light. It wasn't the sun. It wasn't the moon. It wasn't a flashlight out looking for her. It was something else, something different, something...divine. ***"The angel of the LORD found Hagar."***

And he said, ***"Where are you coming from and where are you going?"*** Not that he didn't already know – but he was already giving something that Hagar needed, an ear to listen.

"I am running away from my mistress!" She hates me. Abram hates me. The others hate me. No one cares about me and no one cares about my pain. No one!

"Hagar. I care about you. I see you and I care about you. Go back home." And then the best part, ***"I will so increase your descendants."*** Simply, "I will bless you."

And Hagar got up. Her pain subsided some. Hagar went back to her family.

What do you see? The LORD cares for you. No matter how alone you think you are. No matter what other family members have told you. No matter how icy cold they are to you. No matter how much they have hurt you. Here is the reality: The LORD still cares for you.

You might be saying "Prove it! Prove that God feels my pain."

Ok.

"God so loved the world (insert your name there) that he gave his One and only Son (gave/sent him to earth. Gave him up to death. Gave him up to bitterly painful death on a cross for the pains that you have caused) that whoever believes in Him will not perish (meaning you won't be forgotten about. You won't spend eternity alone. You won't be ignored and left to eternal pain) but have eternal life (Life without hurt. Life without pain. Life surrounded by the One who loves you most – your Father. Your brother. Your family.)" (John 3:16).

Those are God's words to you! It is God, your Father, speaking to you: "I love you." It is Jesus your brother beckoning to you: "Come on home." It is God the Holy Spirit holding up your adoption papers signed in Jesus' blood to show you: "Yes, you are a part of this family...where there is no hurt, no pain because Jesus took it all for you!"

And just like that, the hurt is gone, right? Well, the hurt we cause God, our Father, yeah, it's gone because of Jesus.

But, come on, we're realists. There's still hurt here. You might be feeling hurt right now...by a friend, a loved one, your family.

So, what now? What can you do? What's the solution?

1. See the God who sees you. Because this truth – that God cares, that God is there, that God sees you and sees your pain and is actively doing things to help with that pain – even as he has already done all that's necessary (on the cross) to take away that pain eternally – this truth helps with our household hurts right now.

In fact, it helped Hagar so much that she stopped drowning her sorrows in the desert and instead focused on this incredible God who saw her and spoke to her. She called him, "The God who sees me."

It's kind of like a kid...late at night. He's nervous because it's dark and he heard a mysterious hooting coming from outside his window. And he's trying to be brave and he's trying to be strong, but he's still a bit nervous. So, he gets out of bed, sneaks to the stairs, and looks at the living room. There's mom. There's dad. They are still here. And he is no longer afraid.

It's the same when we spend time in God's Word. We are reminded we aren't alone. We aren't dealing with family pain alone. We are dealing with family pain – in the presence of the Head of our Spiritual family. We are in the presence of God. So...spend time in God's Word. Spend time at worship. Spend time in study. If you don't, it will only be that much harder to deal with hurt, but with that truth – the hurt will subside.

2. See the hurt of others. Because the reality of Hagar's story is that she wasn't the only one hurting. Abram and Sarai both were, too. If any of them had been able to look past their own hurt and see the hurt of the others around them, the cycle of hurt would have been stopped. The hurting would have stopped. There would have been time for healing.

I know it's hard, but when you are hurting from a fellow family member – trying to focus less on your pain but more on theirs. That's what Jesus did! He looks past his pain – that we had sinned against him countless times and rejected him as God – and he went to the cross in order to heal our pain and guilt and win us an endless, pain free existence in heaven!

Let the truth that Jesus selflessly sought to heal your pain; to empower you to selflessly heal the pain of your family. Because the truth is, what I've noticed is when you start focusing on the pain of others in your family, your pain subsides, too.

It's silly because when we hurt, we tend to only focus on our hurt – again and again and again. Not anymore. Focus on the hurt of your family. Watch your own hurt fade, too.

And, finally, 3. Remember: The One who sees, also hears. In fact, Scripture says, "**Cast all of your anxiety on him because he cares for you**" (1 Peter 5:7). That passage is awesome. It's a command from God in which he says, "Listen to me! I want you to speak to me so that I can listen to you."

And notice – he wants **all** of our anxiety. All of the pain. Because – Americans are pretty private people. We love to smile politely. Sing song our hellos and say things like, "How are you?" "I'm fine thank you." – even when things are falling apart at home. We want to keep our hurt private.

Not with God. He knows you already. Share your pain with him. Tell him about your deepest hurts. Tell him about how people have hurt you. Tell him about how the way you have hurt others is hurting you too. Tell him the things you don't feel comfortable telling anyone else.

Cast all your anxiety on him; because he cares for you. And may God begin to heal all of your pain.
Amen.

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