

He Sees Me
Week Two

The Desert of My Soul

Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

- Hosea 2:14-15

*As we journey here on earth we will experience **Deserts of the Soul**. Jesus sees us in the desert and He longs for us to discover **Him** there. He uses the desert times in our lives to reveal His power and to remind us of His great love! I have experienced a few desert times in my walk with the Lord. While these experiences have been dark and dry and lonely, Jesus meets me there. He is not put off by a little sand in His shoes and His Presence changes everything!*

There was a time that was especially dark and frightening. I was not prepared to face this particular crisis but my time with the Lord changed my life forever.

Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert ...

I was a young wife and mother and I had been plagued by insecurity and fear all my life. I had been a Christian for nearly twenty years at the time. I had answered the call of God to ministry, but the particulars of that call were not yet clear.

Several external circumstances collided at the same time causing me to spiral into a very dark place. Family members I love decided to divorce and my grief over their marriage coupled with the grief of their children broke my heart. At this same time my husband had taken a job with a company that promised him the moon and delivered none of it. The financial strain forced us to move in with our parents and I felt forgotten by the God of my life. To add further confusion to my despair we were abandoned by friends we trusted - Christian friends in ministry.

The divorce of my loved ones left me feeling vulnerable and unprotected. My husband's job situation left me feeling abandoned. The real or perceived betrayal of our friends left me feeling picked on by them and worse - by God.

I cried out to God for months and months begging Him to fix it. I prayed in faith that God would remove the heartache and bring deliverance, but the situations, all of them, only got worse. So I ran. Mostly I hid.

For about a year I was terrified to leave my house. I hardly had enough energy to face the day much less deal with people. I worked for a few pastors at a church in town. I would go to work, come home and spend the rest of the day in bed. I had become a prisoner in my own home. My home had become my dry and weary land.

My husband was Jesus to me during this time. His faith is a steadfast faith and I clung to him for dear life. I was so devastated over the pain I caused him and my little girl, but as hard as I tried I could not get out of the desert.

Jesus found me in the desert.

...and speak tenderly to her.

I knew that my heartache was spiritual and I determined to seek godly counsel. I discovered a Christian counselor at a hospital in Charlotte. I enrolled in an out-patient program and drove to Charlotte two nights a week for eight weeks.

She will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

*Week after week I was exposed to old, familiar Truth. The actual counseling took place in my car on the way to and from Charlotte as Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, taught me to apply the Truth I had heard all my life. He gently peeled back layer after layer of pain and brokenness. **He found me** in the desert and He allowed me to see Him **really see Him** as the unconditional Lover of my soul! I have never been the same.*

From time to time we are hurt by others and hurt by life. (We do our share of hurting as well). What I have learned in the desert is that only the Creator is worthy of my adoration and my praise. When I bow to people I put them in the awkward position of being my god. Only Jesus can be trusted to be my God.

*Would I have discovered all this were it not for this particular **desert of my soul**? No way. Jesus met a trembling little girl in the desert and He rescued me from my sin and from my broken way of doing life. He drew me to Himself so that there would be no mistaking, my worth to Him is not based on anyone else's approval or anyone else's opinion. **He sees me. He loves me.** He came for me. There had been a vote and I was counted worthy, but it was not based on anything I am or anything I have done. It is based on the love of a God who found me in the desert of my soul and rescued me from my sin and from myself.*

There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.

*Toward the end of my therapy there was an encounter with the Lord that has become an altar for me. As I was driving home one night I felt the unmistakable presence of the Lord in my car. His presence made me weep. He whispered to my heart... "Donna, I answered your prayers. I have delivered you. I met you at the point of your **greatest need** and I have set you free. What I have used others to do in your life I will use you to do in the lives of others if you will only follow me. Just speak the Truth." He affirmed His call on my life.*

Oh! What a desert! Oh! What a Savior! I am so grateful for the sand in my shoes!

Day One - Led into the Desert by Him

Remember last week we determined that *The Desert of the Soul* has everything to do with God's response (or His supposed lack of response) to our pain. Do you think Hagar ever dreamed that *her* pain would summon the Presence of the Lord?

Jesus has also heard your distant sobbing. He has come for you as well. Hold on - His Presence changes everything!

Please familiarize yourself once more with our passage. Read Genesis 16:1-7. (Please note: I refer to Abraham and Sarah by their most familiar names even though they do not receive their new names until chapter 17.)

I have poured over this passage for years and there is something very interesting I have discovered.

In verse 4, we are told specifically **when** Hagar began to despise her mistress. When was that?

We are told again in verse 5 **when** Hagar began to despise Sarah. When was that?

In Scripture when things are repeated they are significant.

It seems to me that even though Abraham and Sarah's selfish scheme was for Hagar to have Abraham's baby...*Hagar knew nothing of this plan.*

Now, if Hagar did not know that Abraham married her for her ability to reproduce (what we are told in verses 1-3) what would Hagar have assumed was the reason for the marriage?

Could it be that this insignificant Egyptian slave girl assumed she had been *chosen to be a part of Abraham and Sarah's family*? Abraham and Sarah led her to believe that she had been *chosen*.

Please look at verse 3. There was a wedding ceremony of sorts, although weddings in ancient Bible days were more in the form of agreement and declaration than actual ceremony. Hagar had no real say over her own life (no rights to speak of) because she was Sarah's property. So she was *given* to Abraham by Sarah to be his wife (pretty twisted, huh?). However, she did not despise them *when* she was forced to become Abraham's wife.

Now, right here in our little corner of postmodern USA, you and I cannot understand why Hagar did not despise them when they announced to her that she was to be married to an eighty-five year old man. The Bible is not specific concerning Hagar's age, but even if she were as much as thirty years of age, old Abraham was no prize, right?

We will unpack this in weeks to come but please understand that at the time of this narrative, *marriage meant significance for a woman*.

Some things never change, huh?

(If that statement especially stings your heart, I am so sorry. I would never mean to be insensitive. Please hold on for a few weeks. The Lord has a particular word in Genesis chapter 16 for the woman who feels *she has never been chosen*.)

Hagar had been with Abraham and Sarah for a while now. She had witnessed Abraham's great love for his Sarah. Was it her turn to be loved in that way? *Being treasured by a man meant significance for a woman*.

Some things never change, huh?

Notice, she did not even despise them *when* he slept with her. She began to despise them *after she knew she was pregnant*. When did she *know*? Was it one month, two months? There were no pregnancy tests, no drug stores on the corner. I imagine that once Sarah put her plan into motion she was determined to see it through. A scheming woman is nothing if she is not persistent. (*Besides, I have already crossed the line. If I am going to experience God's wrath I might as well get a baby out of it.*) We always know when we have crossed

that line. Hagar was most likely sent into Abraham night after night after night after night to seal the dirty deal.

Why didn't Hagar despise them then? *Because she had been chosen.* Every woman wants to be chosen. It is within the heart of every woman to be seen, to be taken note of, to be chosen. I am thinking there was even more to it than that.

Abraham and Sarah were God's representatives on the earth at this time.

Please look at Genesis 12:7-8, 13:3-4, 18. What was Abraham in the habit of doing?

One of my favorite commentators writes:

Wherever Abraham went in the land of Canaan, he was marked by his tent and his altar. The tent marked him as a stranger and pilgrim who did not belong to this world (Hebrews 11:9-16 & I Peter 2:11) and the altar marked him as a citizen of heaven who worshipped the true and living God. He gave witness to all that he was separated from this world (the tent) and devoted to the Lord (the altar). His pagan neighbors saw that he had an altar but no idols. He had no "sacred places" but built his altar to God wherever he pitched his tent. You could trace Abraham's steps by the altars he left behind. He was not ashamed to worship God openly while his heathen neighbors watched him. (Wiersbe: Be Obedient)

Not only had Hagar witnessed Abraham's devotion for his wife, she had witnessed his love and devotion for His great God. Abraham's worship was in plain view of Hagar. He had a reputation with Hagar of being a worshipper of the living God. Since Abraham was such a great man of God He would have surely consulted his God before taking Hagar to be his wife, right? Surely Abraham would not have agreed to all of this without the blessing of God. Therefore it stands to reason that Hagar believed - *God must have chosen her as well.*

Their little scheme started to unravel in verses 4b-6. What happened?

The jig was up - she had been used.

What were Sarah's exact words in the very last sentence of verse 5?

Day Two - Discovered by Him

On my husband's side of the family there are seven grandchildren. Our two girls are the youngest grandchildren while the five older grandchildren are boys. Over the years I have watched some of the most tender scenes played out between my girls and *the boys*.

Whenever one of *the boys* plays too rough with princess number one or princess number two ☺ one of the other boys swoops in to protect and defend. (I have actually watched them play football with Hannah riding on someone's back for fear she may get hurt on the ground.) Nothing has the power to move the heart *more* than when a gentle man tenderly protects a little girl.

I have two brothers, one older and one younger. They were NOT tender with me. ☹ They were rough and tumble boys and I was forever *in their way*. Intentionally and unintentionally I got hurt a lot (physically and emotionally). I would always run and hide... *and pout*. (After all, pouting is just good for the soul. LOL!!) No. *Pouting summoned my father*.

My dad was *the great leveler*. He did not love me more than he loved the boys (although they would probably have something to say about that ☺). My dad just knew that I was no match for them. Whenever he felt that I was mistreated or bullied he stepped in to "level the playing field." He would declare, "She's a girl!" There was an expectation in his voice when he reminded them of my gender - an implication that my brothers should have intuitively known how to treat me - *a girl*.

There is something so tender about the scene played out here in Genesis chapter 16 when Jesus moved in as *The Great Leveler*. Allow me to recall the scene we discussed last week.

Whenever the Word allows us a glimpse into heaven the angels are gathered around the throne praising and worshipping the King. In my mind's eye *on this particular day* I see Jesus hush the angels to better hear a sobbing in the distance. Hagar's broken heart caused Jesus to come near.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Ps. 34:18

All of heaven peered over the side of heaven...Jesus watching Hagar, the angels watching Jesus as He wept over this broken little girl crafted by his own hand.

Then, without warning He left His throne to comfort her, much the way a gentle man moves quickly to comfort a small child. *What a thought*. Jesus...moved...toward her.

Please write Genesis 16:7 here:

Jesus came looking for her.

Please refer to the beautiful verse in Hosea that we ended with yesterday, Hosea 2:14-15.

Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

Last week when I gave you the biblical definition of the word *desert*, this verse was listed as a reference to the part of the definition that stated, "Intriguingly, the desert is a place where God repeatedly shows His love and His faithfulness to His people."

What do you think it means - "*I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert*"?

Do you think that the Lord is powerful enough to have stopped Abraham and Sarah's scheme?

Look at these verses and write your thoughts please.

Isaiah 40:26

Jeremiah 32:17

The Lord is *all* powerful. The earth is His and everything (everybody) in it acts and moves at His bidding. Why did He not intervene and stop this mess? Abraham was a man of great faith. He was in the habit of listening to the Lord. Even if this had been a particularly weak moment for Abraham and Sarah they would have surely listened to the Lord if the message had been accompanied by a lightning bolt or a clap of thunder. Why was this allowed?

Was it allowed *for* Hagar?

Why has your pain been allowed? Is that what grieves your soul most - that your almighty, *all* powerful God could have stopped your pain and He chose not to? Why? What is He doing?

He has lured you into the desert. There is something He wants to say to you.

In our pain we hear him calling and likewise, we seek Him. What if He knows that your heart (my heart) is bound by such fierce independence that we would never seek Him apart from a gentle breaking? Let's take a moment to confess our stubborn heart.

His tender words revealed His heart to her.

Jesus surprised Hagar. She never dreamed that Abraham's God would come looking for her. She thought He had voted with Abraham and Sarah and that they had *all three* voted her out. The *misunderstood Jesus* found Hagar in the desert. He came looking for her because He wanted to set the record straight. He was not a part of their scheme. His plan for her was blessing. He led her into the desert so that He could speak tenderly to her.

We discover the love of Jesus in the desert.

Most of the time our pain and subsequently our desert time is all about the Lord getting us off to Himself. I believe that it was important for Hagar to experience the God of Abraham *when Abraham was nowhere around*. He did not love her because of her association with Abraham. If he had appeared to her in the presence of Abraham she would have forever believed that it was her relationship to Abraham that caused Jesus to love her. The desert was all about Jesus getting Hagar all to Himself. Jesus loved Hagar. He loves you too.

When my dad found me as a little girl in my pain, he dealt *with me*. He comforted me. He protected me. His presence made everything better. However, he did not speak evil about my brothers because my dad truly loved my brothers every bit as much as he loved me. Please note that when Jesus found Hagar in her brokenness He did not discuss her offenders. Jesus loved Abraham and Sarah. He does not love you and me more than our offenders. (We will discuss this at length in weeks to come.)

We have a *Great Leveler*. His ways are higher and greater and I cannot dare to wrap my head around His economy but I know this...*nobody gets by with anything*. Leave your offender and your circumstances to the *Great Leveler*. Like a gentle father, he understands

equal amounts of justice and mercy. Besides, He has other things He longs to discuss with you. Things like...

I see you there. I know where you have been. I saw the way you were mistreated and I have come to rescue you. Don't despair. I will give you back your dignity and turn your Valley of Trouble into a door of hope. You won't believe all the plans I have for you. Beneath my gaze you will sing like you did before.

Little more time? Sing for Him.

Day Three - Known by Him

Jesus called Hagar by name.

Please write verse 8 of chapter 16 here:

What were the two names Jesus called her?

Why do you think Jesus called her "servant of Sarah"?

The scripture is not clear but could it be that Jesus was getting right to the source of Hagar's pain? What other name (besides your given name) would he call you?

I have learned over the years that it is so much easier to talk to Jesus (than to other people) about the concerns of my life. After all, He has witnessed it all. Trying to make others aware of all the particulars can be wearisome.

To be seen is to *be known*.

There is great comfort in *being known* as long as the person who knows you loves you.

Don't we all desire to be known?

I cast my mean old brothers in a bad light earlier but the truth is I adore them. My older brother's approval has always been very important to me. I am not exactly sure why those older siblings have such a hold on us poor, picked-on younger siblings. I will prayerfully get to the bottom of that one of these days. 😊

If you took the Ruth study with me you know that our daughter Haley was married a few months ago. Weddings are the backdrop for some very sweet moments and there was a sweet encounter with my older brother that took place the day of her wedding.

I had worked tirelessly the days leading up to the wedding because after all, I was the mother of the bride. Most of the details were my responsibility and I literally got lost in them. The day of the wedding was no exception and quite frankly if I had not gotten my dress on when I did I would have missed the whole thing. LOL!

The bridal party was in seclusion until the wedding so we really did not speak with any of our *loved ones* until after the wedding. We peaked through a couple of windows and saw a few people arriving but that was the extent of it.

The music began to play and the time came for my husband to usher me to my seat. He and I had not spoken to each other a whole lot that day because after all we were about to give our daughter away. If we opened those flood gates we may not have been able to get them closed again. 😊

The music signaled the wedding party and they all took their places. Another song played as the *Call to Worship*. The entire wedding party and the groom were in place. The stage was all set for the bride. The song used for Haley's entrance began to play and that was my cue to stand inviting the congregation to stand as well.

When I stood and turned to my right to get a glimpse of our bride, I met my brother's face. I could not see Haley for the people but *he never looked her way*. While the rest of the world was looking at her *my big brother was looking at me*. It was only just a moment before Haley came into view but he said so much looking into my face *in that moment*. Things like, "I am so proud of you" and "Isn't this an amazing day? "I know your heart is breaking." "I wish mama and daddy could be here with us today. They would be so proud."

I am known by him. There were so many things *we did not need to say*. We have history. We have lived it together - all the joy and the pain. We have shared the births of our babies and the deaths of our parents. He has known me at my worst and I have seen him at his best. We have laughed and cried together. We have loved and hated each other. I am known by this man. There is comfort in being known as long as you can trust the person who knows you *to love you*.

Day Four - Forgiven by Him

When Reggie and I were dating I would always get very uncomfortable when he stared at me. I have never been one who is *comfortable in my own skin*. I was afraid that he would discover a reason to bolt!

The gaze of Jesus makes us uncomfortable. *We are afraid what He might see.*

I have wondered at the placement of this story - this little Gentile slave girl tucked inside the pages of Scripture. It is strategically placed right in the middle of God's great promise of redemption. God chose Abraham to be the Father of His chosen people - the Jews. From this people would come the Messiah, the Savior of the world - *the Savior of the world*. God loved Abraham and God loved the children of Israel, *and God loved Hagar*. I believe the story of this little slave girl stuck right here in the middle of God's redemption plan is a stark reminder that Jesus is also a light for the Gentiles - *and praise His name, that's me.*

Abraham was certainly a major player in redemption's story, but the Lord used Hagar to establish the Apostle Paul's ministry to the Gentiles (centuries to come)! Hagar was significant. Her story is significant.

What did the woman at the well say? (John 4:29)

She sounded very excited about that, did she not?

Let's look at how Jesus treats sinful women.

Please read John 8:1-11

I always thought they threw her to the ground. For some reason that made me feel better about it all because she was able to hide her face. But in actuality, what did they make her do? (verse 3)

There has always been speculation about what Jesus wrote on the ground. I have my own speculation. (Hey! No one knows for sure! ☺) I believe that as she was standing there humiliated and swimming in her shame, the Great Defender, my Defense, her Defense, the Gentle Jesus bent down and wrote... *"Don't worry, I've got these guys!"* (I'm not sure what that looks like in the original languages. LOL!!)

Look at another sinful woman in scripture. Please read Luke 7:36-50.

What leads us to believe she had a reputation? (verse 37)

Oh, the whole town was aware.

I wonder why she was weeping. Could it have been that in His Presence she felt *known*?

He did know her, yet He defended her.

He knows you. *He really knows you*, yet He loves you. The Enemy brings your sin (and mine) to Him every day.

If you took my Ruth study you know that I LOVE Zechariah, chapter 3. This is a vivid picture of our Defender at work on our behalf. Please read this chapter.

Please take note of how the Lord defends Joshua (you and me) when the Accuser brings our sin to view. What do you see Jesus do in verse 2? (Just one verse!)

He dismisses Him. With a wave of His glorious hand HE DISMISSES HIM by reminding him WHO we are. We are the redeemed! We are the ones snatched from the fires of hell. He did not even give as lengthy a dissertation as I just did. He simply waved Him off!! He just swatted at Him like a gnat.

You know I could show you the same Jesus in at least a dozen other passages. (And you would not even grumble would you? I heard that! ☺)

How does this relate to Hagar?

Please pan out for just a moment and let us look at these two chapters, the events we have already discussed over the past couple of weeks.

Over there to your left, do you see our most Gracious God, our Holy Other God, walking through death *cutting covenant* with Abraham, promising to be a God of His Word. (Take a moment right here to worship! Surely that moves you the way that it moves me.) Our Holy God, OWING CREATION NOTHING *cutting covenant* with His creation? The thought makes me tremble.

Now, look to your right. There is the wonderful Jesus in the desert with Hagar also come to His creation cleaning up a mess. He came to defend the wounded, the broken, the insignificant.

And right there in the middle of it all between the God of redemption and the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world is Abraham, Sarah and Hagar. It does not get any better than these three. They are a picture of you and me, dependent on the grace of a mighty God, loved by Him, redeemed by Him, forgiven by Him.

Oh! What a Savior!

(We will discuss Hagar's sinful actions, the part she played and the Lord's response to it in the weeks to come. For now please note, Jesus simply told her to do what she was supposed to do. No condemnation.)

Day Five - Redeemed by Him

Hagar is infamous. She was chosen to be a part of His Story.

She is the One chosen to encounter The God Who Sees.

Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

- Hosea 2:14-15

Therefore I am now going to allure her: I will lead her into the desert...

Is there a desert place in your life? Nobody enjoys the dry, dark, lonely desert, but what if Jesus were to discover you there? My guess is that it is probably a place you do not discuss very much.

...and speak tenderly to her.

There are things only Jesus knows to speak over you. Be very still and listen. Surely you desire to be found by Him and known by Him.

There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.

What is your Valley of Achor (Valley of Suffering, Valley of Trouble)? If you missed my spoken lesson this week, please look at Joshua 7 for an explanation.

There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

Do you remember when you used to sing? How long has it been since you have praised, really praised the Lord?

The promises Jesus made to Hagar in the desert are vast and require an entire week's lesson. We will discuss this under the last section of our study entitled...

I Know Where You Are Going

