

“Fear not, for God has heard...” Genesis 21:17

By Kaitlin Young



I've always been drawn to the story of Hagar, perhaps because I love seeing the heart God has for those who are lost and broken. Since becoming a mother, her story resonates on an even deeper level, as I understand with new depth the desperate breaking of her heart as she sat alone in the desert, away from her son, not able to bear the thought of watching him die.

In my childhood, I would pour over old copies of a National Geographic collection and I would soak in the photos of people and places and ways of life so unlike my own. Now in a later generation, where news and photos reach the masses nearly instantaneously, I see the stories in real time. In the middle of the night, when I'd be rocking my daughter to sleep, I'd have tears streaming down my face as I'd center in on photos of Rohingya women and children escaping, or the babies strapped to their mama's backs fleeing from South Sudan, or the migrants waiting with their little ones on a boat or in a line for refuge. My mind would wonder, "what would I do if that were me?" It's by God's grace it isn't me at this present moment. I'd wonder how one decides to leave everything they know and risk their life and their loved ones' lives because anything is better than where

they are? What do you do when you have no idea if you can provide safety or sustenance for the children in your care? And so, I'd rock my child and my heart would break for these women who I so desperately wanted to love and had no idea how other than to pray.

Being a parent changed my perspective in many ways. I knew that would happen, you just never know exactly *how* until you're in it. I've struggled with anxiety in the past – as a biblical counselor, I can quickly identify it's usually my desire to be in control. The Lord has worked on my heart in this in many ways over the years. I've seen Him at work in my heart as I identify the struggle to be anxious and wrestle to obey in faith. The sanctification process is a beautiful thing to look on, but, since there isn't an end to this process until glorification – I know there will be times when my desire for control is going to want to rule my heart more than Christ. I will be given more opportunities to grow.

As any person who likes things neat and orderly all the time – I sometimes, in my pride, have anticipated the ways God is going to test me on this. So, in preparing to become a parent, I prayed and reminded myself that my child is going to show me how little control I have. Often, I figured my child's schedule or willpower would be the test of that. And, because the Lord doesn't allow me to dictate the comfort of how my sanctification is going to be walked out, it really wasn't that much at all.

It never occurred to me how much I would grapple with the weight of responsibility in caring for a newborn daughter plus facing all of the things that were going on outside in the world I couldn't control. I so desperately wanted to protect my daughter. In my head, I know God is in control, that He loves her more than I ever could, and has a good plan for her life. In my heart, I wrestled with not trusting that something could happen to her. I work in a place where I hear of tragedy and trial, perhaps more disproportionately than most, and I had to work through anxiety that something wouldn't happen to her too.

This is where I remember Hagar. Alone in the desert and pregnant, she is met and acknowledges "El Roi" – the name of God that says He sees. She is to name her son Ishmael, meaning "God hears." Here is a servant woman from a pagan nation sitting alone in the middle of nowhere and God reminds her that He sees *her*. He hears *her*. In a very real and personable way. We too, get to know a God who sees and hears us. Every tear, every fear, every thought in our mind and desperate plea – God knows. So

in those moments, when I am not sure what is going to happen, I can be comforted and reminded that God sees me and hears me.

Years later, as Hagar is now sent away into the desert, this time with her son, she is reminded yet again that God hears. He tells her, “What is the matter, Hagar? **Do not fear**, for God has *heard* the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad...” (Genesis 21:17-18a). God graciously met her yet again. He did not leave her just to remember words spoken long before, but met her once again and in compassion provided for their needs, physically and spiritually in reminding her who He is. God’s command not to fear is next followed by an action (“arise”). So when I am tempted to be afraid I can:

1) **Remember who God is!** Whether this passage or any in Scripture that describes God’s heart, His power, and His sovereignty in all things. I need to remember the God I love.

2) **Repent** – when I reflect on my own heart in fearful moments, I need to see what I am worshipping that is not God. For me, that’s often a desire to know and have security in outcomes I feel are out of my control. I need to repent of that pride in wanting things my way, instead of trusting God. His plan is better, He is greater, and I am crazy in thinking I could do it best!

3) **Take action** – I can pray, I can sit with Scripture, I can talk through and ask for wisdom from others, I can serve, and I can love in the ways God has called me to. I need to arise and get busy taking care of what God has placed as my responsibility day by day and leave the rest in His capable care.

I had a dream about a month after my child was born. There was an earthquake, and even though she was right next to me, no matter what I did I couldn’t reach her. I woke up completely panicked. Not even a month later, I was up in the night with her and we did have an earthquake. While relatively small (and honestly, I was so sleep deprived, I

verified other people felt it on Facebook because I thought after my dream maybe I was making it up in my head), I remember rocking her and thanking and praising God. He *knew*. He was so kind to care for my heart and have me already up and holding my daughter when that earthquake hit. Now, He is still good and loving regardless of whether that was how He determined this event would go. But, He saw me and was so gracious to allow me to hold and care for my little one with the same protective care He places over His children. He loves us so much.

What are you struggling with when it comes to fear? Do you trust that your Father is El Roi – the God who sees? Who sees *you* and sees all you have faced and all you will ever walk through? Do you trust that He is the God who hears? Who inclines His ear to you as you call to Him and delights to hear from you? Pour out your heart to the God who knows you and walks with you. Just like a mother who was one alone, broken and fearful, God meets you. Do not be afraid.