

The Long Life of Sin
Genesis 16
August 22, 2021

Have you ever noticed how mistakes tend to multiply with us humans - It seems like when we make good decisions, that tends to lead to more good decisions - but the same is true for our bad decisions - One bad choice seems to always lead to another - then another - then another!

You see this in sports all the time - a golfer, for instance, is cruising along - playing great - one good shot leading to another - then another - but, all of the sudden he miss hits one shot - it lands somewhere deep in the woods - never to be found.

Or he hits a ball in the water - and he begins to press - he begins to think about failure - he suddenly forgets all of the good shots he has made - and the only things his mind can see that bad one he just hit!

This is exactly what happened to golfer Jordan Speith in the 2016 Masters - He had been in the lead from the first day of the tournament - He was cruising along with a one stroke lead when he came to the 12th hole - it is the famous par 3 with Rae's creek running just in front of the green.

(PICTURE)

Then he did something he hadn't done each of the first 3 days of play - He hit his ball just short of the green and it rolls down into the water - Then, he hit his second shot . . . into the water **(Picture)**

Then he hit his third shot - this time, fearing he will hit another ball short into the water, he hits it too hard and his ball lands in a sand trap on the back of the green!

When he left the 12th hole, he was now behind by 3 shots **(Picture)** - he would never recover - he lost the tournament that day by 3 strokes! - All because he let one bad shot turn in to three bad shots.

Had he only made the FIRST ERRANT SHOT, he would have most likely won that day - but one became two - then it became three - and he had to settle for second place on a day when he probably was the best golfer on the course!

Have you ever had a similar experience? - I don't mean on the golf course, but in some other area of your life - Things are going great - You're following the Lord closely - Your living a life of obedience - You're making good decisions and wise choices.

Then it happens - YOU BLOW IT - You make a sinful choice - Maybe you did it knowingly - or maybe you just had a moment of weakness - but either way, you sinned - and you know it.

But then it got worse - rather than INSTANTLY REPENTING and turning your life back in the right direction, you try to fix things - or worse, you try to cover them up - this causes you to make another bad decision - And before YOU CATCH YOURSELF, you make another sinful choice!

Before you know it, one failure has turned into five or six - suddenly (Spiritually Speaking) you haven't just RUN OUT OF GAS - you have run out of gas - drove the car in a ditch - and set the engine on fire!

What should have been a momentary setback for you, has become a disaster - what should have been a slight detour, has become a trip into a places unknown!

What is it about us humans that causes us to turn one mistake into multiple errors of judgment - I don't know - but I know it happens to the best of us.

This morning we are going to look at the life of a man who also got off to a great start - But along the way he made a couple of bad decisions - and over time, they seem to multiply on him as well.

His name was Abram - Or as he is better known "Abraham" - the Bible calls him "God's friend" - **James 2:23, And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God.**

Our passage today will remind us that even the closest walk with God DOES NOT FREE US from the dangers of being human - Or as Paul puts it in **1Corinthians 10:12, Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.**

Abram had such a GREAT START with the Lord God - God had HAND PICKED Abram - God could see THE DEEP FAITH of this man - and so God called him out of the Land of Ur to go to a NEW HOME - and by faith Abram took his family and left.

When Abram arrived in this Promised Land, a place called Canaan, the first thing he does is BUILD AN ALTER for worship - There he worships God - Giving thanks for ALL THE PROMISES God has made to him and his family!

But, there is a FAMINE in the LAND OF PROMISE - this may have surprised Abram - Think about it - Did God bring him to the Promise Land to let he and his family STARVE TO DEATH in a famine?

Abram, like us, may not HAVE BEEN EXPECTING TO BE TESTED - especially right after we have shown such obedience! - I can hear Abram saying, **“What is going on? Didn’t I just leave everything behind to follow God to this land? Now there is a famine here!”**

So, he makes mistake #1 - He leaves the PLACE OF PROMISE (the place of Blessing) to travel down to Egypt - Then, fearing the Pharaoh, he makes mistake #2 - He lies to Pharaoh - He tells this PAGAN RULER that Sarai is HIS SISTER - which was sort of a half truth - but his goal was deception!

BUT, OUR MERCIFUL GOD protects Sarai - and she is returned to Abram UNHARMED - God even blesses Abram with flocks and servants while he is there - We really do serve a God OF GRACE - even when we blow it, God often continues to blesses us!

But, it appears one of those servants that Abram and Sarai left Egypt with was a YOUNG SERVANT GIRL named Hagar - she will play a PROMINENT ROLL in our story today - and as we look at our story, LET’S REMEMBER that she is most likely a part of the family as a result of THE SINFUL CHOICE to go down to Egypt.

When we get to chapter 16, many years have passed - it has been at least 10 years since God last reminded Abram that Sarai that they would have a PROMISED SON! - To say they are GROWING IMPATIENT would be an understatement.

Let's begin reading in Genesis 16:1

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar. 2 So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.

When we read this passage with our MODERN PERSPECTIVE, we are appalled that Sarai would propose such an arrangement - But, this would have been a CULTUALLY ACCEPTED PRACTICE in that day.

This is not to say GOD APPROVED of the practice - only that it was accepted in that culture - Which brings up a very important truth that we need to remember: **Just because something is culturally acceptable, does not make it acceptable to God!**

Cultural acceptance is a MOVING TARGET - God's truth as REVEALED in the Bible is a CONSTANT - If you go to the world to FIND TRUTH TO BUILD your life on, just understand, that TRUTH MAY CHANGE every few years!

Abram and Sarai MADE THE MISTAKE many believers have made - they ignored the CLEAR PROMISE & TRUTH of God - and took the easier path of following the TRUTH AS INTERPRETED by culture around them - Why WAIT ON GOD when the ACCEPTED PRACTICE will get us instant results? - It will get us WHAT WE WANT now!

I like the words of commentator John Phillips on this passage: **Abram wanted a son and heir more than anything in the world. Sarai was frustrated beyond words at her inability to give him one. Added to that witch's brew were an attractive slave girl, a legal loophole, some worldly reasoning, and a carnal resolve. The result was an entanglement so snarled and so twisted that four thousand years have not unraveled it.**

In that day, EVERYONE AGREED that it was a great way to SOLVE THIS PROBLEM of infertility - Everyone that is EXCEPT GOD!

But, they were going to HELP GOD OUT - Whenever the thought, **“I can help God out!”**, crosses your mind, STOP RIGHT THERE - You have just enter the DANGER ZONE of thinking & planning! - As quickly as you can EMPTY YOUR MIND of that kind of thinking! - You are about to make a giant mistake.

Having Hagar become a SURROGATE MOM for Sarai was their plan - upon birth, the child would belong to Sarai - Seemed so easy - seemed such a smart way to accomplish God’s plan.

God has established in His Word what is ACCEPTABLE TO HIM! - He has established HIS PLAN - He has revealed how we should LIVE OUR LIVES - Be careful whenever you side with what is CULTURALLY ACCEPTABLE over what God has revealed to us in His Word.

Trust me when I say, the path this world is going to send you down is not the SAME PATH God’s Word is going to send you down - **Proverb 14:12**
There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

Just because something SEEMS RIGHT, that doesn’t make it right! - If it goes against the CLEAR TEACHING of Scripture, be careful - The consequences of that choice may be FAR MORE DEVASTATING than you were planning on.

This would certainly be the case for Abram and Sarai - but let’s not get ahead of ourselves.

Notice, Abram **“heeded the voice of Sarai”** - this was the FAMOUS MISTAKE of Adam in the Garden of Eden - He disobeyed God in an effort to please his wife! - And husbands, don’t we all FEEL THIS PRESSURE at times?

A loving husband wants to please his wife - Most men want to KEEP PEACE in their home - And let’s face it, sometimes THE VOICE of our wife may speak to us a little louder than the voice of God - especially if we are LISTENING ATTENTIVELY to the quiet voice of the HOLY SPIRIT.

Wives, this is where you need to UNDERSTAND THE DANGER - Most husbands (if they’re smart) will listen to their wife.

There is NO VOICE in the world I value more than my wife's voice - For this reason, through the years Donna has been very careful EXPRESSING HER THOUGHTS on certain things.

She would always say to me, **"I want you to listen to God, not to me. I don't want to influence you in the wrong direction."** - Though sometimes I wanted to know her thoughts, I always valued her restraint.

But, it did put a lot of pressure on me to SEEK GOD'S WILL for my family - I had to be the SPIRITUAL LEADER - We have to GUARD AGAINST following our wives just to please them.

Then, Abram made a SECOND MISTAKE! - **3 Then Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan. 4 So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes. 5 Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes. The LORD judge between you and me."**

Abram had gotten away with some SINFUL DECISIONS - but they were about TO CATCH UP to him - We always reap what we sow - and now the REAPING BEGINS!

The pregnancy of Hagar now confirms that Sarai has been the problem! - I think she SECRETLY HOPED TO PROVE that Abram was the problem - but it is NOW OBVIOUS to everyone that he wasn't - Now she is humiliated BEFORE EVERYONE - Especially HAGAR!

Hagar is suddenly ELEVATED by the pregnancy - She begins to ACT HAUGHTY towards Sarai - and Sarai REACTS BY ATTACKING her husband!

"My Wrong be upon YOU!" - And she was right - God would hold Abram responsible for this decision! - He was learning an important truth - **Trying to please others (even those we love) is no excuse to disobey God.**

Look at the CONNECTION OF SINS - It is amazing how one BAD DECISION, one sinful choice can lead to more:

No Egypt - No Hagar

No Hagar - No Surrogate

No Surrogate - Ishmael

No Ishmael - No sinful, complicated family situation (that would last for centuries!)

Be careful of the COMPOUNDING EFFECTS of sin! - Don't let one bad decision turn into many!

6 So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence. 7 Now the Angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. 8 And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?" She said, "I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai."

Abram makes another BAD DECISION - He tries to PACIFY Sarai again - Rather than TAKING RESPONSIBILITY for the problem in his marriage that he created, he is PUTTING IT OFF on Sarai!

Sure it was HER IDEA - but it was HIS CHOICE - Husbands, we need to remember this - In God's eyes it doesn't matter WHOSE IDEA IT WAS - What matters is that you & I made the decision to do something we knew was wrong!

Adam knew it was wrong to EAT THAT FRUIT - Abram knew GOD'S PROMISE was for he and Sarai to have a child - And you know when you are AGREEING TO DO SOMETHING that God has told you is wrong! - So, DON'T PASS THE BUCK back to Eve, or to Sarai, or to your wife when you go along with it!

Sarai is HURTING - And hurting people hurt people - she is BRUTAL & UGLY with Hagar - We don't know exactly what she did to Hagar, but whatever it was it caused HAGAR TO RUN for safety!

God may have HATED THE DECISIONS that have been made, but He loves the people involved! - Hagar was probably headed back to Egypt - Sur was SOUTH - but it was a WILDERNESS - Most likely she would die in that wilderness - **But, God intervenes.**

Notice the question the Angel of the Lord asks her: **“Where have you come from and where are you going?”** - it wasn't that the Angel did not know - God is causing her to stop and CONSIDER HER DECISION!

Is running from our problem ever really the answer? - NO, usually not! - God wants us to face our problems - Deal with them - Solve them!

Today, we don't RUN TO THE WILDERNESS - We run to A BAR - or to our STASH - or we escape into OUR WORK - Or we change Jobs - or change spouses - or we change churches - **the pathway of escape goes on and on!**

And yet at some point God asks you: **“Where have you come from and where are you going?”** - He asks you, **Why are you running?** - He can help you solve that problem - It may not be easy, but you can do it - You just have to STOP RUNNING & FACE IT.

Pro 24:10 - If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.

Philippians 4:13 - I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

I love these two verses - One reminds me of MY WEAKNESS before Christ - the other reminds me of MY STRENGTH in Christ! - When Hagar met the Lord, she went from WEAKNESS TO STRENGTH - From unwilling to FACE HER FOES - to being willing to stand in the face of adversity!

9 The Angel of the LORD said to her, "Return to your mistress, and submit yourself under her hand."

No one ever said FACING YOUR FOES would be easy - only that God would give us the strength we need to do it - Look at what God REQUIRES OF Hagar - **“Go back and submit yourself to her!”**

I PROMISE YOU this is not what Hagar wanted to hear! - She was more thinking in terms of GOING TOE TO TOE with Sarai - I think she was INSPIRED FOR A FIGHT! - Instead God instructs her to GO BACK & SUBMIT!

Go back and submit to the one who just HUMILIATED YOU - Go back and submit to the one who made YOUR LIFE MISERABLE - **“God, you have to be joking!”** - But, God was PERFECTLY SERIOUS!

Let me make one thing VERY CLEAR before I go on - God never ASKS US OR REQUIRES us to step back into a situation where we are being PHYSICALLY OR EMOTIONALLY ABUSED - That is not what’s going on here.

If you have left a marriage or a relationship because IT WAS ABUSIVE, don’t misapply this to THAT SITUATION!

But, a DIFFICULT SITUATION is not necessarily an ABUSIVE SITUATION - just because it is UNCOMFORTABLE, EVEN COMBATIVE doesn’t mean it is abusive.

The situation Hagar was in was both uncomfortable & combative - She was PART OF THE PROBLEM - And Sarai was part of the problem - And THIS IS THE PATTERN most difficult situations - it generally takes TWO PEOPLE to have a fight.

Yes, Sarai was mean to her - and maybe she even told Hagar TO GET OUT - at a minimum she was making Hagar’s life miserable - but I don’t think it was ABUSIVE - because I don’t believe God would have sent her back into that kind of life.

But, I think there are many times when we RUN FROM SITUATIONS just because we don’t like it - we are uncomfortable - we don’t like how we are BEING TREATED - we don’t like the atmosphere around us - **so we bolt!**

And that is when God steps in and says GO BACK - stop running - but not just that - SUBMIT to this person you view as the enemy - swallow your PRIDE!

Pride usually is often at the root of our running to begin with - **"I'm not going to be treated that way! I'm not going to put up with their attitude! I'm going somewhere where I am LOVED & APPRECIATED!"**

In the NT we have the wonderful story of a RUNAWAY SLAVE, "ONESIMUS" - He ran away from the home of PHILEMON - He ends up in a Roman prison next to the Apostle Paul - He knew Paul - for Paul had spent time in the home of Philemon teaching God's Word.

Onesimus was RUNNING FROM Philemon, and he was running from God - Once he surrenders his life to Jesus there in the prison, Paul has two words for him - RETURN & SUBMIT!

Paul send the runaway slave back home to Philemon - His first step in following Jesus was to RETURN - His second step was to HUMBLE HIMSELF and submit back under the authority of his master!

But, why you may ask? - Because just like with Hagar, that is where Onesimus would FIND THE BLESSINGS of God!

AND God wants TO BLESS you as well - but you will have to go back SO HE CAN! - Look at verse 10.

10 Then the Angel of the LORD said to her, "I will multiply your descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude." 11 And the Angel of the LORD said to her: "Behold, you are with child, And you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has heard your affliction. 12 He shall be a wild man; His hand shall be against every man, And every man's hand against him. And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."

God knew something that HAGAR DIDN'T KNOW - It would be the RELATIONSHIP WITH ABRAHAM, his father, that would be the key to her son's BLESSING & FUTURE!

If Ishmael had lost THAT CONNECTION, he might have been lost to history - but it was being a SON OF ABRAHAM that made him special and blessed.

It is interesting that God did not harbor anger against the child for the mistakes of the parents! - God was going to bless Ishmael - He would have A LARGE FAMILY of descendants - Most Bible scholars trace the Arab people groups back to Ishmael - Originally were mostly A NOMAD PEOPLE who lived on the Arabian Peninsula.

Listen, you may have come from A TROUBLE BACKGROUND - Your FAMILY HISTORY might be a topic you avoid like the plague - But, please know this, God DOESN'T JUDGE YOUR LIFE based on the life of your parents.

Every person stands before God based on their own faith - the FAITH OR FAITHLESSNESS of you ancestry has no bearing whatsoever on your relationship with God - If you come to Christ, you are a NEW CREATION - old things have passed away - behold all things become new!

Some of you need TO LET GO of your past - Stop blaming history for YOUR PROBLEMS TODAY - Sure, you may have gotten a ROTTEN DEAL when it came to YOUR FAMILY TREE - but that doesn't mean you can't start a NEW TREE with your generation!

The sad truth about Ishmael is that even though God would bless Ishmael - even though he was raised by a man OF GREAT FAITH - even though he WAS CIRCUMCISED by his father as a sign of that faith - he would never be a person of faith.

God said he will be A WILD MAN - a COMBATIVE man - He appears to have lived out that prophecy.

My point is this: Every person has the SAME OPPORTUNITY to forge a PATH OF FAITH with God - Neither a GODLY HERITAGE nor an ungodly one will determine your future - Your WALK WITH GOD depends on you.

Verse 13 - **Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees (El Roi); for she said, "Have I also here seen Him who sees me?" 14 Therefore the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; observe, it is between Kadesh and Bered. 15 So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. 16 Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.**

El Roi - "You are the God who Sees" - This Angel of the Lord that meets her is no doubt an OT appearance of Jesus - And He is the "God that sees".

He sees us when we are IN OUR MOST DESPERATE moments - I'm sure Hagar thought she was ALL ALONE out there on the run - But Jesus SAW HER - Just like HE SEES YOU.

No one else MAY BE WATCHING - No one else may SEEM TO CARE - But EL ROI does - Jesus, the God who sees, IS WATCHING - He knows what's going on - He knows that you HAVE BEEN HARMED - that you feel UNWANTED & ALONE.

Cry out to Him - Reach out to Him - He SEES - He KNOWS!

There appears to be reconciliation between Abram, Sarai and Hagar - Apparently Hagar did as God commanded her - She HUMBLed HERSELF - She returned and SUBMITTED herself to Sarai.

Is EL ROI calling you to RETURN & SUBMIT to the circumstances you have been running from? - You might just find that those uncomfortable circumstances are the PLACE OF GOD'S BLESSING!

It take FAITH & COURAGE to return and submit yourself in a situation that doesn't appear to be WARM & WELCOMING.

Four Big Thoughts:

- **Just because the culture says something is fine, doesn't mean it is fine with God!**
- **Don't disobey God in your desire to please others, even those you love!**
- **Sin can have long-lasting consequences! Be careful not to let your bad decisions multiply!**
- **Don't Run from your problems! Return and Submit!**



