

Study Guide
Series: Lessons from the Wilderness
“The God Who Sees”

Monday - Psalm 118:1-9

This psalm was part of a hymn collection rooted in God’s action at the time of the Exodus to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt. Its message fits perfectly with the story we’ll study this week: the story of Hagar, an Egyptian slave girl who twice found herself cast off and alone in the wilderness. Her story, like Psalm 118, reminds us that we are never abandoned, because God is always with us. This psalm began with the invitation to “Give thanks to the Lord because he is good, because his faithful love lasts forever.” Then it invited specific groups to repeat, “God’s faithful love lasts forever!” What can make it hard for you to keep focused on the truth that God’s faithful love lasts forever? In what practical ways can you build daily reminders that God’s faithful love lasts forever into your life? What bad things in your life has God’s presence helped you survive or even turned to a good purpose? How does that affect your trust in God moving forward?

Tuesday - Genesis 16:1-6

Sarai and Abram had waited ten years for God to fulfill the promise that they would have a son. Sarai gave Abram her servant Hagar as a “wife”, a common practice in their culture. After Hagar got pregnant, she saw her ability to become pregnant as a sign of superiority to her barren mistress. Sarai set this whole chain of events in motion, yet she was very unhappy with the results. Verse 5 quotes her as telling Abram, “This harassment is your fault.” Have you ever felt like blaming the results of your own choices or actions on someone else? What has helped you to take responsibility for the things you do, so that you do not allow blaming to further damage relationships? Last week we studied about “wildernesses” of our own making. To what extent is there an element of that in the predicament in which Hagar found herself? What can you learn for your life today from watching Hagar’s story unfold?

Wednesday - Genesis 16:7-15

Hagar’s lack of respect angered Sarai, who treated her harshly. Hagar then fled from Sarai’s abuse into the desert—a harsh and desolate landscape, in which a pregnant woman alone was unlikely to survive. Yet, God’s messenger (a Hebrew word that is also translated “angel”) met Hagar in the desert, and along with a directive to bear the challenges of living with Sarai, gave her a tremendous promise: “I will give you many children, so many they can’t be counted!” Hagar was amazed that God saw and cared about her. In what ways has God sent messengers into your life? What has helped you to realize that God sees you and cares about you? It’s easy to overlook one remarkable aspect of this story. The Israelites usually didn’t like Ishmael’s descendants (and still don’t). Yet for centuries they faithfully repeated the story of God seeing Hagar and caring for her and her offspring. In what ways did this episode begin to make real God’s promise that through Abraham “all the families of the earth” would be blessed (Genesis 12:3)? What reasons do you have for being glad that “there’s a wideness in God’s mercy”?

Thursday - Genesis 21:1-11

In God’s own time, the promise of a son for Abraham and Sarah (God changed their names; cf. Genesis 17) became reality. They named their son Isaac (“laughter”). When they celebrated his

weaning, Sarah saw Ishmael laugh. She demanded that Abraham evict Hagar and Ishmael, so that there could not be any doubt that Isaac was Abraham's promised heir. It had been a long wait for Abraham and Sarah, but God's promise proved reliable. At times we don't see God's promises realized in this life at all, but wait for eternity. When have you had to wait longer than you wished for a divine promise to come true? Are there promises you are still waiting for? What helps you to hold onto faith and trust as you wait? Genesis honestly depicted a sharp difference in Abraham and Sarah's emotions. For Sarah, it was clear-cut: she saw Hagar and Ishmael as rivals, and wanted them gone. For Abraham, it meant divorcing Hagar and disowning Ishmael, who was his son, though not Sarah's. When have you faced a situation, in family, friendship or workplace, in which loyalties and emotions conflicted? How did God's principles help you to sort things out and make your way through?

Friday - Genesis 21:12-21, 25:8-9

Hagar and Ishmael were in despair in the wilderness. Ishmael collapsed, dying of thirst, and his mother wept. Ishmael's name meant "God hears." God did hear their cries, and responded (verse 17). God was the same yesterday as he is today (Hebrews 13:8), so you can count on God hearing you, too. When have you sensed God hearing your cries in the midst of a wilderness experience? Hagar was divorced, rejected, and abandoned with her son, Ishmael. Their chances of survival were minimal—except for God's care and provision. But God intervened and "opened her eyes" so that they could find water. God still provides today, and one of the ways he often provides is through other people. How can you join God and help to "provide" for your friends and family? Your church family? Your community? Your world?